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OR,

Breaking the Meshes of the Golden Coil.

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AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "PHIL
FLASH," "DODGER DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

TWO LATE ARRIVALS.

BILLY WINKS, the head bell boy of the Metropolitan Hotel, looked up at the clock and saw that one hand was covering the other.

It was just twelve—midnight.

No persons were in the office at the time but the clerk and himself, and when he had noted the hour he fell back on the bench in his favorite corner and went off in a doze.

"WE HAVE DISCOVERED THE LOST HEIRS," SAID THE VILLAIN GLOATINGLY. THE PHILADELPHIA SHADOWER STARTED.

All at once he was startled by a cry.

"Front?"

Billy Winks sprung up, awake in an instant, and crossed to the desk where the last arrivals were now standing.

These were two men. One was taller than the other by at least two inches, and both were well dressed.

"Here, Front, take these gentlemen to 291," commanded the clerk, tossing Billy a key.

In another moment the boy was leading the way to the elevator, which, owing to the lateness of the hour, he was compelled to manage himself, and all were soon on their way to the third floor.

There was nothing particular about the men to claim more than a passing look from the lad. He was used to seeing strange people, and settling back in one corner of the elevator, he let them talk without so much as trying to catch a word.

"Well, how do you like it?" suddenly asked the taller of the pair, addressing Billy.

"How do I like what?"

"Why, being up at all hours running the elevator?"

"Oh, anything suits me," was the reply.

"Been at it long?"

"Two years."

"Got used to it, then?"

"This isn't my part of the job. The elevator boy went home sick early in the evening, and I agreed to help him out."

"So. What's your name?"

"Billy Winks."

Both men laughed a little at the oddity of the cognomen.

"Billy Winks is a nickname, isn't it?" queried the shorter man.

"I guess it's all I'll ever have," returned the boy; "I've had it ever since I can remember."

The elevator stopped, all stepped out, and Billy showed the guests to Room 291.

He was about to quit the chamber when one of the men caught him by the arm and stood him off at arm's length.

"Have you always lived in New York?" he asked.

"Always."

"Born here, then?"

"So far as I know. Oh, I've been out of the city, down to Coney and around; but never for long at a time."

"Got any relatives?"

"None that I know of. I've looked the Directory over time and again, but I never could find any Winkses. It's not very queer, though, for mine isn't a familiar name, you know, and I guess I'm the sole and only Winks in the city."

Once more the two men smiled and Billy was released.

"Good-night!" he said as he withdrew and the next moment he was moving toward the elevator.

"I wonder if I don't look like some one they've seen before?" his thoughts ran. "They looked at me so closely that it must be something of the kind. I'll go down and see who they are."

He found the night clerk half asleep in his chair.

"Where are they from, Chip?" asked Billy, going up to the desk and tip-toeing to get a look at the register.

Chip smiled half dreamily and the boy read as follows:

"Chuck Holcomb, Philadelphia.

"Fred Phlox,

"Quaker City gents, eh?" he smiled, turning away, and went back to his seat in the corner.

In a little while he fell into another doze to be again awakened by the call of "Front!" and when he opened his eyes he saw Chip looking at the room board back of the desk.

"291 has called. Go up and see what is wanted."

Away went Billy Winks, and when he reached the room to his disgust he found the two in a game of cards and that they wanted a pitcher of water.

He had no sooner crossed the threshold than they began to eye him as before and one of them, the smaller of the pair, said pleasantly:

"Billy Winks, eh? That's a funny name—funny enough to be a nickname."

"I know it's funny and you're not the only gentlemen who have been attracted by it."

Billy brought the water and when he came near the door, walking softly on the carpet in the hall, he was startled by a sentence.

"I tell you he's got the Pettibone eye and nose. I don't let anything deceive me and this is a hunt that must not be given up till success crowns our efforts."

"I half believe you're right, Chuck, but, what surprises me is, that we should strike the trail so soon, if we have struck it."

"Look at his eyes when he comes with the water?"

In a moment Billy was at the door and when he opened it the two men fell to their game.

But all at once the gaze of Phlox was fastened upon him and he felt himself drawn under a strange influence.

There was no questioning this time, and when the men had looked at him awhile one tossed him a half dollar and he went out.

Billy Winks now had something to think about, and when he was again seated on his bench he did not fall asleep, but kept his bright eyes wide open and thought of what he had overheard at the door of 291.

"I wonder if they meant me?" he thought. "They looked me through, as it were, and I thought they would pin me to the wall with their eyes. I don't know any one in Philadelphia, never was there to my knowledge, and, as I told 'em, I haven't a living relative in the world."

Billy Winks was relieved from duty early in the morning and when he touched his hat to Chip, as was his wont, he went out upon the cool street and made a bee line for home.

"The bell boy's home was nothing great in the line of homes—only a little garret-like room at the head of a flight of steps, and when he had opened the door with a pass-key he threw himself upon the rough couch with a sigh of relief."

Not many moments elapsed before the scene at the Metropolis was forgotten in sleep and the breathing of the boy was all that disturbed the silence of the chamber.

"Billy? Billy Winks?" called some one at the door, and the bell boy springing up and rubbing his eyes went forward and opened the door.

"I thought you was going ter sleep all day," and a queer looking specimen of city humanity slipped into the room and took a chair.

A little old man past sixty with a quantity of gray hair, rather feeble of step, but bright-eyed, and good-looking.

"I've got another idea in my head," he remarked, with a smile, as he drew from beneath his coat a bit of work which looked like a little model of some new invention.

"If I thought Edison would treat me fair, I'd take it to Menlo Park and show it to him. It's all right now and all I want is capital to get it started."

He placed the machine on the table, touched a spring and away it went, humming like a hundred bees with its wheels and fans.

"It works well enough as a model, Pappy Pink," said the boy, gazing at the little thing so busy on the table. "I wish I had ten thousand dollars to start you out."

"Bless your heart, you'd give it all to me, wouldn't you? I know you, Billy Winks. You've got a heart as big as Vanderbilt's fortune; but you'll never get the ten thousand as long as you are a bell boy at the Metropolis."

"Right you are. There's no fortune there for a bell boy. We boys don't strike big tips there though I did get a half-dollar last night."

"No."

"Here. Look at the shiner, Pappy Pink," and the boy tossed the silver piece on the table. "Take it and buy something for the machine."

"Where did you get it?" asked the old man, picking up the money and eyeing it closely.

"One of the last arrivals gave it to me—Mr. Chuck Holcomb from Philadelphia. There are two of them and they eyed me like hawks and asked me forty questions about myself."

"They did, eh? Now, look here, Billy! I've always said there was a future in store for you and that you'd turn out something besides a mere bell boy. Does everybody whom you take up in the elevator look at you and ask you questions about yourself?"

"Not one in a thousand."

Pappy Pink seemed to reflect for a moment.

"Are they there yet—these two men?"

"Yes."

Ten minutes later the little old inventor had taken his departure and Billy was alone.

If he had followed Pappy Pink home he would have seen him write a few lines which he sealed in an envelope and took in person to the Metropolis Hotel.

Handing the letter to the clerk he said it was to be delivered to Chuck Holcomb, Room 291, as soon as possible.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE MESHES.

It happened that no bell boy was yet on duty at the Metropolis when the note was delivered,

therefore the clerk placed it in the key-box belonging to Room 291 and went about his business.

He did not think of the letter any more that day. Holcomb and his friend came down to a late breakfast, finished it and went out.

They did not return until evening when the clerk suddenly thinking of the letter in the box, called Holcomb up to the desk and delivered it.

It was evident that the guest of the Metropolis was surprised, and when he broke the seal and glanced through the contents of the sheet his astonishment increased.

The letter was brief and little better than a poor scrawl, but Mr. Holcomb was more than surprised.

"Here's a stunner in the right direction, Flash," he said to his companion and in a moment Phlox was reading as follows:

"MR. CHUCK HOLCOMB:—

"I am here in the city and want to see you right off. I think I am in possession of the very information you want, and if you can trust me I will put you on the right track. Come to me at once, and don't let any one see you."

"PAPPY PINK."

"It looks straight," said Chuck, looking at his friend whose astonishment seemed as great as his own.

"It's a windfall if it is anything," was the reply. "You must go at once. We want to strike the trail as soon as possible for I want to get at the stakes."

Holcomb looked at his watch and glanced at the seat usually occupied by Billy Winks, but the bell boy had not returned.

"Stay here and watch the boy," he suggested to the Phlox. "I tell you he has the Pettibone face, and I dreamed of him last night. Don't render him suspicious by questioning him, but let us work under cover, and not spring the mine till everything is ready for it."

Chuck Holcomb, with Pappy Pink's letter in his pocket, sauntered out in the street and walked off. Directions for finding the old man had been given in one corner of the sheet, and he resolved to walk the whole distance, as the hiring of a cab might attract undue attention.

It was a long walk, for the house occupied by Pappy Pink was across the city, and he was yet three squares from it, when he was stopped by a man.

Holcomb turned and saw a tall, dark-faced person, with a full beard, which was very black.

At the same moment a closed carriage drove up to the sidewalk and halted.

"That is the gentleman I want to see. I am quite sure of it," was remarked as the door of the vehicle swung open and Holcomb saw a face on the inside.

"The gentleman wants to see you, sir," said the man who had stopped the Philadelphian. "You will oblige him by stepping forward for a moment."

Suspecting no trap, Chuck obeyed, and stepped to the open door, when he was seized by a hand that seemed to have a grip of iron, and with the assistance of the man who had hailed him on the street, he was hustled into the vehicle and the door was shut on all.

"Not a word, Mr. Holcomb!" warned a menacing voice, as he was thrust back into one of the dark corners, while something like a handkerchief was placed over his mouth.

"What right have you to seize me in this manner? You—"

"Hush! You talk at the risk of your life. We know what we are doing."

Away went the carriage, and the hands at his throat, choking him almost into insensibility, prevented him from uttering another word.

Holcomb thought of the letter in his pocket, and tried to reach it for the purpose of throwing it into the street, but was prevented by one of the men, and after a long drive through a portion of the city unknown to him, the cab halted and he was helped out.

He now found a cocked revolver at his head, and was walked into an alley, where they found a door, and Chuck was led into a house.

"Place him in a chair, Simon," and the man from Philadelphia was conducted to a seat, while the gas was turned on, and for the first time he saw two men with whom he was destined to have some lively adventures.

Both were determined looking fellows, and it was plain to Chuck that they were highly amused with the success of their trick.

"Turn out your pockets, Mr. Holcomb," ordered one of the men.

Chuck Holcomb looked indignant.

"You are playing a game liable to get you into trouble, and the best you can do is to let me go as soon as possible," Chuck urged.

His words were answered with the revolver, pushed close to his face.

"Go through him, Simon!"

And Simon at once put his hand on his prisoner.

"If he offers resistance, you shall search a dead man, Simon," he of the six-shooter went on. "He's gone through more than one man in his lifetime, and he shouldn't object to a bit of his own medicine."

Holcomb, seeing that resistance was useless, allowed Simon to search him.

There was very little money on his person, but there was the note from Pappy Pink.

Taking this note from Chuck's pocket, Simon tossed it to his companion.

"Hello!" cried that worthy. "Here's a go, sure enough! I told you we'd find something on him, Simon. Search further! Maybe you'll find something else of importance."

But nothing else was found, and when Simon's fingers were withdrawn, Chuck drew a breath of relief, but watched the man who was now reading the letter from Pappy Pink for the third time.

"I reckon you'll let me go now," remarked Holcomb.

"What, let you go? I guess not, Mr. Holcomb. When did you come in?"

"You ought to know, seeing what has happened."

"You came in with a friend. Where is he?"

Holcomb was silent.

"Don't want to tell, eh? Well, keep the secret, if you want to. It is immaterial to us. You were on your way to call on the writer of this note, weren't you?"

"No!" cried Chuck, with the boldness of a born deceiver. "I wasn't moving toward his house at all."

"You were mighty close to it, anyhow," laughed the other. "I guess the letter tickled the right spot in your conniving brain. Pappy Pink? Is that what he calls himself now?"

No answer; then Simon, at a sign from his friend, retired for a moment, but only soon to return with a pair of steel handcuffs.

"By heavens! you rascals sha'n't manacle me!" cried Holcomb; but the revolver was thrust forward once more and he saw a pair of gleaming, tigerish eyes behind it.

"We intend to do what we please, so don't give us any unnecessary trouble. If you had remained away you would not have fallen into the trap we set for you."

Chuck evidently wished he had remained away, for, menaced by the revolver, he was secured with the bracelets and found himself a prisoner of the chair.

"Well, what success had you two?" asked the spokesman.

Holcomb's answer was a vengeful look.

"What is he going to pay you to strike the trail and carry out his schemes?"

"See here," suddenly cried Chuck. "I don't intend to tell you anything. You may manacle me, you may even keep me a close prisoner in this house or elsewhere, but you can't loosen my tongue. No, you can't do that!"

There was a laugh from Simon who stood at the back of the chair, and the next moment he was leaning over and looking down into Holcomb's face.

"You've heard of missing men, I suppose?" he suggested. "You are likely to join that caravan of the missing. Yes, Chuck Holcomb, you have seen your friend in the game for the last time, for you have fallen into the grip of the Golden Coil, and unless you open your mouth and tell the truth you will die where you are!"

An expression of set resolution settled over the Philadelphian's face.

"Don't you intend to tell us anything?" asked the man with the revolver.

"Not much, I don't!"

"Don't, Simon! Give him time for repentance," and Simon fell back and looked at the prisoner, vindictively—murder in his heart.

"We've struck the trail in this," went on the other, holding Pappy Pink's letter in Chuck's face. "We know something now we had not known before, thanks to your coming to Gotham, Mr. Holcomb."

The occupant of the chair made no reply and with another look full of meaning the men withdrew.

"In Heaven's name, where am I?" the prisoner asked himself.

He made an effort to quit the chair, but some unseen agency held him to the seat; the chair was a trap, capable of holding him as though it had jaws of steel.

CHAPTER III.

BILLY WINKS STARTS HIS TRAIL.

A SHORT time before these exciting events, Billy Winks, with some time on his hands, before he was expected to go on duty at the Metropolis, left his humble quarters and made his way to the home of a friend, whose friendship extended from a chance acquaintance that happened some time prior to the opening of our story.

"I haven't seen Josie for some time, and I'll kinder drop in and see how she's coming on," he mused, as he ran nimbly up a flight of steps and knocked at a door in a narrow hall on the second floor, back.

"Heigh, Josie!" cried the bell boy, springing into the room and surprising a neat-looking girl of seventeen, who had just put away the remains of a frugal supper. "I was going down to business, but thought I'd drop in and see how the world was using you. You look as fresh as a peach, Josie."

The girl blushed under the compliment.

"Rattling the type-writer don't seem to hurt you, Josie. I believe it does you good, really, now I do."

"One has to do something, Billy," was the reply, "and I guess my fingers were made for just what I do every day."

The bell boy crossed his legs and looked admiringly at the type-writer.

"You don't see that man any more, do you, Josie?"

"Hush! I saw him again to-day," was the answer. "He nearly frightened me to death, for I did not know he was near, and when I looked back as I sometimes do when on the street, I found him right at my shoulder. I nearly fainted."

"I would like to know who he is. He's been watching you off and on for months, hasn't he, Josie?"

"For three months, at any rate. I believe I haven't made a single trip to the office that he hasn't seen me. It is something terrible to be watched that way! This morning something exciting happened on the car. An old man was robbed by some pickpocket, and of all he had, too. He went on at a terrible rate, for a time, and then broke down and sat half-dazed in one corner. I pitied him from the depth of my heart, and when he got off I alighted, too, and made him take a little something to help him along."

"That's just like you, Josie. You've got a big heart. I'll bet you gave him all you had."

"Not quite, Billy," smiled the pretty type-writer. "I left myself enough to get home on. I gave the old man my address; he seemed to want it. And then we parted on the sidewalk."

"You didn't know him, Josie?"

"He said he was a stranger in the city—that he had come to New York on an important errand, and there he stopped suddenly, as if something strangely affected him, and left me rather suddenly and was swallowed up in the crowd on Broadway."

"He wasn't like the man who has been watching you?"

"Not at all. That man is a villain of the deepest dye, and I have been thinking of giving up my job and not going out on the street any more."

"Don't do that, Josie—at least not until I can get a look at the man. I'll follow you down town to-morrow, but you are not to notice me at all. What do you say?"

"That will be the thing, Billy. I want you to get a fair look at my watcher, for I am sure he will be on my track in the morning."

"What does Nelse say?"

"Oh, he wants to call in the police, but I don't want to get into the papers."

"Has Nelse seen the man?"

"Once, I believe. He caught sight of him on Broadway in company with another person who seemed to be his chum."

"Then, there are two of them?"

"It would seem so from what Nelse says, but I have seen but the one, and he has frightened me enough."

Billy Winks arose and went to the window.

"I'm going on, now, Josie," he said. "I had a run of luck last night. Got a good tip, but was almost stared out of countenance by two men from Philadelphia. Good-by, Josie!" and, with the cheery good-by of the type-writer ringing in his ears, Billy Winks darted from the room and went back to the hotel.

For some hours he saw nothing of either Holcomb or his partner, Mr. Phlox, but at the end of that time he caught sight of the latter in the office, considerably disturbed in mind.

Phlox was watching the main entrance of the Metropolis with all eyes, and every now and then he would go to the door and look up and down the street.

These movements did not escape the keen eyes of the alert boy, and for some time he amused himself watching the nervous man who, after every trip to the door, became more disturbed than before.

"Mebbe he's lost his mate," thought Billy Winks. "He acts that way, anyhow, but I guess he won't tell me anything—not from what I heard last night."

For some time Phlox had glanced at the boy on the bench, and at last, after four hours of mental torture, he came forward.

"Here you are," he remarked, taking a seat beside Billy.

"I'm always on hand," was the reply.

"Where's your friend?"

In an instant the face of young Phlox paled.

"To be plain with you, that is just what puzzles me," he answered. "I'm afraid everything did not go well with him, and if I thought he had fallen into a trap, I should go mad."

"Into a trap?" echoed the boy, and then he gave a prolonged whistle of amazement. "You don't think a trap could catch a sharp like yer pardner, do you?"

"I—don't—know," slowly answered Phlox, with a shake of his head. "There are some mighty shrewd men in these cities and they're capable of catching anything."

"They're cute in New York. Was yer pardner to come back very soon?"

"He didn't expect to be gone over an hour, and here six have passed and he isn't back yet."

"What do you think?"

"I daren't tell you. I think the most horrible things you can imagine."

"He must have gone off on important business?"

"He did, he did! See here, boy. Do you know—"

"Flash" Phlox put his hand to his forehead for a moment to brighten his recollection and then continued:

"I have it now. Do you know any one named Pappy Pink?"

Billy Winks nearly fell from the bench.

"Old Pink, the inventor? I should say I do!"

"I don't know what he does, but I do know that is the way he signed the letter."

"He wrote a letter, did he?"

"Yes, to Chuck. It was signed 'Pappy Pink,' and I thought at the time it was the funniest name I ever heard."

"You thought mine was funny, too, didn't you? I know Pappy Pink, but the queer thing with me is that he should know anything about you."

Phlox did not reply for a moment, but the bell boy watched him closely.

"Could that letter have been a decoy?" the Philadelphian asked at last.

"What, the letter from Pappy Pink? Not a bit of it! I know the old man and he is as harmless as a dove. All he knows is how to get up the queerest machines you ever saw, and one of these days he'll strike it rich and then we'll be somebody."

"We?"

"Me and Pappy Pink. He always says he is going to share the fortune with me unless mine comes first, when I am to share with him."

Phlox seemed to forget his companion for a moment.

"Where would your fortune come from?" he asked, looking into Billy's face, intently.

"From the moon, probably," and the bell boy whistled again. "I should think it would be as likely to come from there as anywhere else. But, it's funny that Pappy Pink should write to your companion."

Perhaps Flash Phlox thought that he had said too much, or had resolved to curb his tongue, for he relapsed into silence and it was some time before he spoke again.

During his silence he continued to watch the door, or look at the clock in the office, and whenever Billy Winks came back to his bench, after serving some guests, he found the man in the same mood.

"I can't stand this any longer," suddenly decided Phlox, dropping down upon the bench beside the lad. "I believe you are honest and square, boy, and can keep a secret. Chuck and I came to New York on some very important business in which there are thousands not only for ourselves, but for a lost boy and girl if we can find them."

Billy looked at the man and saw that he was telling the truth, or at least he thought he was.

"We are liable to be crossed if our business becomes known to another party," Phlox went on. "It is a deep game of diamond cut diamond. A great injustice has been done; but I am not at liberty to go back and tell you all I know. If Chuck has fallen into bad hands through the decoy letter—"

"If that letter actually came from Pappy Pink it was not a decoy," broke in Billy Winks. "I'll go the old man's security for honesty. He don't know how to be a rascal. As I have told you, all he knows is how to put wheels and pulleys together, and make the most wonderful machines you ever heard of."

"It may be as you say. I read the letter Chuck got, but I forget Pappy Pink's address."

"I'll give you that," cried Billy, "and if you'll wait ten minutes, till 'Jingle' comes in, I'll go with you."

Mr. Phlox concluded to wait, and in a short time "Jingle," another bell boy, came in, and Billy got leave of absence, for the purpose of "guiding the gentleman to another part of the city," but, in reality, to inaugurate the most thrilling adventures of his life.

CHAPTER IV.

PHLOX'S STORY.

"MR. CHIP, if you please, I've come to throw up my job."

The bediamonded young clerk who presided over the desk of the Metropolis Hotel looked at Billy Winks like one in a maze.

"Throw up your job?" he cried. "What, don't it suit you?"

"Oh, I haven't anything to complain of, but the truth is, Mr. Chip, I've gone into other business."

When Chip had recovered from his astonishment the proprietor was called in, Billy was paid off, and walked out with some money in his pocket.

At the door he was joined by Flash Phlox, with whom he walked off, saying, while his face was lit up with a smile:

"I'm at your service from now on, Mr. Phlox. I believe what you told me in Pappy Pink's deserted room to be the truth, the whole truth and nothing else, and the fact is, I'm interested in this mysterious affair as I've never been interested before in my life. The question is not only what's become of Chuck Holcomb, but, why has Pappy Pink run off without leaving word behind?"

Billy Winks and Phlox, whom we saw at the conclusion of the previous chapter on their way to the abode of the old inventor known as Pappy Pink, was confronted by a genuine surprise when the bell boy opened the door.

The little room was quite deserted, and everything pointed to a hasty flight.

"I don't think the old man intends to come back any more," said Billy, looking round the room, while Phlox stared with open eyes and pale and speechless. "It's very queer."

"Hang it all, it's amazing!" broke out Flash. "I feel as though he knew we were coming, and went off just to beat us."

"There may be more in this flight than you think. I still stick to it that Pappy Pink never intended that letter to decoy anybody. He is incapable of doing that."

"But it seems to have gotten Chuck into trouble."

"I'm afraid so; but look here! we ought to be able to find Josie at home now."

"Who's Josie?" asked Phlox.

"The best girl in the world. I don't mind introducing you, but I don't think Nelse will like it very well. Nelse is somewhat sweet on Josie, but no one can cut him out, so we will go and see her."

The pair went from the old man's home to the room occupied by the pretty type-writer, and the moment Phlox entered the room and set eyes on Josie he fell back with a cry that drew Billy's attention to him.

"Why, what's the matter, Phlox?" he cried. "It's only Josie, and she wouldn't hurt any one. Josie, this is Mr. Phlox, and we have gone in partnership in a little matter."

Josie looked first at the boy and then at his companion. She could not conjecture why Billy should form a partnership with Flash Phlox, who, while handsome and well dressed, did not very favorably impress her.

When the introduction had been gone through with, Billy suddenly asked the type-writer when she had last seen Pappy Pink.

"Not for some days," was the reply. "He

then dropped in to show me his new idea, and did not stay long as I was sick and he would not bother me."

All the time Phlox was looking most strangely at Josie, and when he and Billy had left the house he caught his companion's arm, and exclaimed:

"Who is that girl, Billy?"

"Why, Josie."

"Yes, yes; but Josie who?"

"Josie Jackson."

"How long have you known her?"

"Nearly ever since I've known anything. It's kind o' queer that Josie and I should be friends, for there's not much in common between us; but somehow or other, we seem to have been drawn toward one another, and I think as much of her as I would of a sister, if I had one."

Flash Phlox did not reply for a moment, and then looking again at the boy, he went on:

"I'll bet a dollar that the fellow who gets Josie will get a fine one."

"That girl's finer than silk, Phlox," declared the boy. "The other day she gave her last cent to an old man who had been robbed on a car. That's Josie Jackson all over. She's got pluck, too—could fight if she had to. I don't know where she gets her blood from, but it's the right kind."

"I believe you, Billy."

"Now, Mr. Phlox, if we could find Chuck—"

"Heavens! we must find him," was the reply. "There is to be no ifs and ands about this question. There is too much at stake. Chuck Holcomb must turn up."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll resign my position at the hotel and devote my whole time to this hunt. You don't want to employ a detective?"

Flash Phlox started violently.

"I don't want to do anything of the kind," he said. "I would sooner go back and leave the whole thing unraveled than throw this case into the hands of the ferrets of this city. I have told you too much already, Billy—that is, more than I should have told you. You know what brought Chuck and I to New York; you know that we are employed by a certain man to discover, if possible, what ever became of two children whose home was destroyed by fire over in Jersey, years and years ago when they were little more than babes. You know what awaits them if they still live. The fortune is simply enormous, though the man who is using it is spending a good deal of it, but there is enough left to enrich the young heirs."

"But, Phlox, do you think the father of the children really perished in the fire?" asked Billy who had not lost a word of Phlox's story.

"The impression is that he did. You see that it is to the advantage of the man who is using the property not to have the children turn up. He is a cool rascal who will not spare means to keep himself in possession of the fortune—the 'Pettibone Fortune,' as it is called among the people there. The children disappeared the night of the fire and from that hour have never been heard of. The iron safe which stood in one corner of the Pettibone library was found in the ruins of the fire and when it was opened it was found to contain a will made in a singular manner. That will said: should the children die or 'disappear' (that's the very way it was worded) the property after a certain time should descend to the man who holds it now."

"What claims had he to it?"

"He once saved John Pettibone's life, and the old man was much attached to him. But, at the end of the will there was a clause that said a good deal in very few words. In substance, this was, that, should Blake Belden, the man now in possession of the fortune, marry a certain woman, the children should have the fortune, no matter when they turned up. Don't you see? Well, Belden married the very woman John Pettibone hated, and now he wants to make sure that the heirs of the estate don't turn up."

Billy gave a whistle.

"I see. And the man who sent you to New York pays you and Chuck Holcomb for looking after the two children because he wants to beat Belden out of the estate?"

"That's it. More than this: it is believed that the fire which destroyed the house was not accidental—that the father, John Pettibone, if he did not perish in the flames, would tell the truth and so place Blake Belden in very tight quarters. We believe that Belden has kept in his employ in this city men who have been looking for the Pettibone children—not with any kind intentions either."

"I should say not, Phlox, when one hears the story of the past. I hope the children, if they

are alive, won't fall into the hands of Blake Belden's agents."

"If they do they are lost forever; that is all there is of it," was the confident assertion.

"This does settle it," cried Billy Winks with emphasis. "I am going straight to the hotel and throw up the job."

The above is how the boy's resignation came about and when he walked from the Metropolis Hotel, and looked up into Phlox's face he smiled good-naturedly.

"I never thought I would become a little ferret, myself, Phlox; but, I'm going to find the Pettibone children and baffle Blake Belden's agents. I know this city as few boys know it, for before I went into the hotel I was a sort of gutter-snipe and nobody knew the dark places of New York better than Billy Winks. I guess we understand one another, Phlox. If I see anything suspicious about you I'll drop you like a hot potato and you may do the same with me."

"I don't think I shall have occasion to do anything of the kind," said the other. "I am sure Chuck would not have made you his confidant, for Chuck is a queer chicken, but, just now, he isn't in the bargain, and, in fact, I believe he is in a tight trap of some kind, or he would have put in appearance long before this."

The two went to Billy's room where they had a long talk, at the end of which the Bell Boy Detective thought he could trust the man to a certain extent.

"Now I have a little job on my hands for tomorrow morning," observed Billy. "I promised Josie to take a look at the man who has been dogging her footsteps to and from her work."

"What shall I do?" asked Phlox.

"Go back to the Metropolis and keep both eyes open."

Flash promised to do this, and when he and the boy separated for the night he returned to the hotel, wondering what would come of the adventure.

As for Billy Winks he glided from his room and went back to the little place once occupied by Pappy Pink in hopes of finding some trace of the old inventor.

But, he found nothing, and as he came down the steps he stopped and looked at a man standing in the shadow of the wall with his hat pulled over his eyes.

CHAPTER V.

BILLY HEARS SOMETHING.

FROM the looks of the man, as the boy could see him, he thought at once that he was the person who had followed Josie Jackson to and from the office where she worked the type-writer.

What had brought the man to old Pink's house?

While the bell boy looked the figure moved, and all at once sprung out into the street and vanished.

Billy stood awhile on the stair and then went down.

He saw no one, but to make sure that the man had come to Pappy Pink's den he watched the doorway for some time, but the fellow did not come back.

"That was a singular proceeding," said the boy to himself. "I won't go back and tell Josie, nor will I hunt up Phlox and say anything to him. I'll just keep my own counsel and see what comes of this adventure."

His earnest desire was to find some trace of Chuck Holcomb, but he had not forgotten the story of the lost children and the fire in Jersey.

An hour later Billy almost ran into a man who looked very much like the person he saw on the stair, and the following moment he was surprised to see the man joined by another who was much younger and rather dudsish in appearance.

"The youngest one is the man Nelse saw with the watcher on Broadway," Billy muttered, and then he fell to watching the twain as he would have watched a brace of tigers.

The longer he looked at them the firmer grew his belief that one was the person he had seen on the stairway leading to Pappy Pink's room.

He was well built and handsome, though rather dark of face, and the boy noticed that he had a springy step like a cheetah.

"A pretty pair, I'll be bound. Up to some sort of mischief too, and if I watch them long enough I will see something that may let some light in upon the very thing I am looking after."

Billy Winks was led after the pair to a street near the river, and while eying the taller one when they had separated, the dude having vanished in another direction, he was astonished to have his arm seized from behind.

"What's up?" cried the Bell Boy Detective, turning the moment he felt the grip, and looking up into the face that confronted him.

He had been caught by the dude, and now he saw that the fellow, while good-looking, had a pair of bad eyes in his head and that he wore gloves buttoned far up his wrist.

"Caught you looking, eh?" he grinned.

"Caught who looking?" echoed Billy. "Look here, don't you know a boy has a right to be out as long as he pleases, and as for looking, I use my eyes whenever I'm out. That's what they're for."

In a second Billy felt that he was being dragged toward the man supposed to be Josie's shadow, and all at once he jerked back and with such force that the man not looking for a play of this sort was thrown forward and the grip was broken.

Before he could re-seize the agile boy, he was out of reach, and Billy laughing in his face told him to take a tighter hold next time and not let a boy outwit him.

Despite his narrow escape from what might have been an unpleasant time, Billy Winks did not quit the vicinity, but came back and continued to watch the man he had concluded to track.

He picked him up after a little search, and was soon on his trail.

In a very short time he found himself in a house which he had entered, and was listening in the dark.

He had tracked the man to the house adjoining, and having seen on the door of the other one the legend: "To Let," he managed to effect an entrance in hopes of hearing something through the walls, as the two buildings were close together.

The interior of the house was dark, and the boy did not move for some time after entering it.

He had been enabled to discover nothing but a coil of rope in one corner, and while wondering what it was for, he was startled by a sound which from the very first enlisted his attention.

The boy ferret had found an iron ring in the floor near the center of the room, and for a moment had associated the rope and ring together in his mind.

Voices suddenly came up from below, but they seemed too distant for him to make out anything but confused sounds.

Billy got down on all-fours and began to feel the floor for a trap door.

He found it so suddenly that a cry came from his lips, and he felt its dimensions besides finding the way to open it.

When he had pulled it open he thought of the rope and the ring, and in a moment had brought the two together.

"I believe I could discover something if I could go down into the cellar and listen at one of the walls. The voices I hear seem to come upward, and I must find out what they mean."

He made one end of the rope fast to the ring, and then deliberately swung over the edge of the trap.

Hand over hand like a sailor Billy Winks lowered his body into the dark place, and the downward journey seemed endless.

Once he stopped in mid-air, for a door somewhere overhead was heard to open and shut.

For once, at least, his heart was in his throat, and when the sound died away he went on.

He reached the ground at last, and found himself in a place as dark as the room above. That it was an old cellar he had no doubt, for it was half filled with rubbish in several places, and he stood for a time among it all and listened.

Billy Winks in the cellar could not see his hand before his face, nor could he hear a single sound.

Suddenly he heard a voice seemingly so near that he recoiled.

It seemed at first that he was not the only occupant of the cellar, but he was soon disabused of this idea.

The voice had come from beyond the opposite wall in the cellar of the adjoining house.

"I guess you won't feel so sanguine when you get out of the net," said some one in tones of triumph.

"Some one will have to pay for it all in the end."

"Do you really think so? Now, don't you think the trumps are all in our hands?"

"No."

"You don't, eh? I'd like to know what you are going to do to beat the game. We know everything you have been doing ever since the old man sent you out on the mission of revenge and recovery. The trail is blocked against you at every point and all I have to do is to raise my

hand and you will step from the drama and will never be heard of again."

There was no reply and Billy wondered who the speakers were.

"What is he to pay you two for finding the trail?" asked the man who had spoken last.

"That is our business."

"All right. Chuck Holcomb, you are at the end of the string and your companion will never hear of you again."

Chuck Holcomb!

The name drew a cry from Billy. He had found the missing pard, but a stone wall separated them and he did not know what else.

Yes, Chuck was just beyond that wall and in the cellar of the adjoining house to which he had tracked the man from the street.

"You haven't been here long enough to strike the trail if it is here," continued the speaker. "We saw you come and planned the neat job we carried out. When you undertake to beat us, Chuck, you will have to stay up all night. We know more than you think and as you are to end your days where you are, I will tell you that we know what became of the Pettibone children and that we intend to see that Blake Belden is not disturbed in possession of his rights."

"His rights?" laughed the other—Chuck Holcomb—derisively. "Why, the only right that rascal has is the right to be hung."

"Come, you're a pretty man to say that. You are not an angel by any means, Mr. Holcomb. But we won't review characters just now. You say you won't tell me what you had discovered before we netted you? Very well; keep the secret."

This seemed to end the conversation for there was no reply and Billy Winks thought he heard the closing of a door.

The silence that came after this sound was almost palpable. The Bell Boy Detective leaned against the wall and tried to locate the man beyond.

But in this he was disappointed for he could hear nothing to guide him though he listened a long time.

"I'll go back and start anew in another place," he said.

Billy groped his way to the middle of the cellar and began to feel for the rope.

Finding it at last he managed to climb up to the room and stood once more over the cellar.

Intent now on getting out of the house with a view to exploring the one where Holcomb was imprisoned he opened the door and caught a whiff of night air.

He had barely touched the step when a figure flitted by and in an instant he hugged the doorway and held his breath.

But a footstep came back, a figure leaned toward him—a figure like that of a giant—and before he could fall back into the silent hallway he was gripped by a powerful hand.

"Watching, eh?" and Billy was drawn toward the speaker. "I've a mind to wring your neck like a chicken; but, I won't do that because you're nothing but a city rat," and the bell boy ferret was thrown into the gutter at the risk of a broken head and the man disappeared.

"I'll make that cost you something yet!" exclaimed Billy Winks as he scrambled to his feet, fortunately with no broken bones.

CHAPTER VI.

TOO FOOLISH BY HALF.

WHEN the Bell Boy Detective scrambled from the gutter he lost no time in getting out of that tough neighborhood.

He returned to the hotel in hopes of finding Phlox, but learned from the clerk that the young man had paid his score and departed.

"I wonder if Phlox hasn't been scared away?" questioned the youthful rogue-catcher. "I could see that he wished he hadn't told me as much as he did, and fearing Chuck's displeasure, he has gone away and I may not see him any more."

The next morning bright and early Billy Winks went down to the neighborhood of Josie's humble home to be on the lookout when she should start to the office where she worked. He was anxious to get a look at the man who had been watching her so long.

In a little while the pretty type-writer came out and walked away. It was Josie's custom to walk several squares and then take a car; but sometimes she varied this custom by walking all the way.

Billy was not noticed by the girl under previous arrangement and when she started off he was not far behind with his keen eyes on the alert.

For some time nothing occurred to interest him and he was about to believe that he was to be disappointed when, in passing a corner, Josie came face to face with a man who looked at her and then followed her toward the office.

"That is he!" said Billy. "That is the man who has been shadowing Josie. He is like the man I saw last night—the one who flung me into the street."

The boy ferret saw that the man was rather tall and fashionably dressed, that he carried a gold-headed cane, looked like a person of wealth and leisure, but at the same time there was about him a look which did not impress the young detective in his favor.

He followed the type-writer at a respectful distance and Josie, wondering if Billy was on the lookout, never looked behind her and instead of taking the car, resolved to walk all the way.

Several times the man seemed to increase his gait, as if to overtake the girl, but as often he changed his mind and let her go on without molestation.

By the time Josie reached the office Billy had had a good look at the man and when the girl disappeared within the building he turned and walked back.

"That's the very man," decided Billy. "I can't be mistaken, and while he is away from the house, why can't I go there and look in the right building for Chuck Holcomb?"

Suiting action to his words, the boy with a final look at the man, went over into that part of the city where he had met with his somewhat thrilling encounter and managed to enter the house adjoining the scene of his adventure.

He found it but little different in shape from the first-named place and when he had descended to the door of the cellar he found it locked.

This made him almost sure that he would find Holcomb in the cellar, but when he leaned forward and called the man's name no one answered him.

Was it possible that the prisoner had been removed to another part of the city—that his presence had frightened the players of the game?

He found an iron bar in the house and returning with it to the cellar door, forced the staple and entered.

The next instant he fell back with a cry and stared at the bare room.

The old place was empty, but there were proofs that it had been tenanted by some one and that that person had been there against his will.

A chair turned upside down lay in one corner of the room and some ropes strewn about told the story of a prisoner.

As the place was quite dark, Billy struck a light and began to explore the cellar.

He suddenly stopped in front of some scribbling on the stones and holding his light close, read the name of Chuck Holcomb. This settled the question of the tenantry of the hole and he was nonplused as to his next move.

It was now certain that Holcomb, who was working in the interests of justice, had fallen into the hands of Blake Belden's hired agents who were trying to baffle him; but what had become of the captive of the underground place?

Billy went back with the discovery agitating his mind. He concluded to look after the man who had paid so much attention to Jessie, the pretty type-writer, and to this end he frequented the down-town streets where he thought he would be likely to run across the fellow.

All at once there crossed Billy's path on lower Broadway, not the girl-watcher, but the dudish fellow who held him in his clutches for a few moments, as the reader will readily recall.

"Follow the slave and find the master," thought the Bell Boy Detective and sure enough a little chase brought him face to face with the other one.

The pair did not seem to be acquainted with each other, but this was mere sham and only served to sharpen the boy's wits.

After an hour's espionage he followed the tallest one into a restaurant, and to his surprise was called up to the table where the man sat.

Billy said nothing, but went forward, wondering what was in the wind.

"Do you ever carry messages, boy?" said the man looking at the young ferret.

"Sometimes," was the reply.

"Would you carry one for me?"

It was evident that the man did not recognize Billy as the boy he had thrown into the street, for he took out his note book and tore off a leaf.

In a moment he was writing, and when he had finished he asked one of the waiters for an envelope into which he put what he had written, and then addressed it.

Billy was eager to read the superscription, and

when he reached the sidewalk his first act was to do this.

He discovered that the letter was addressed to—

"BURTON VAN LOO,
No. 244 S— St.,
City."

"That's in a good quarter," said the boy ferret with a smile. "If I could see what is in this letter I would give a good deal—that is, all I am worth; but I'll deliver it and get a look at Van Loo."

It did not take the young and eager messenger long to reach S— street, and when he ran up the steps of No. 244, he was ushered into a wide hall and ordered to go into the parlor and wait for Mr. Van Loo.

"There's money here," thought Billy Winks while he waited for the master of the house and amused himself looking at the fine paintings on the wall. "This is a better house than the one to which I tracked Chuck Holcomb."

His words were cut short by the entrance of a man at whom he began to stare the moment he caught sight of him.

This was Van Loo, a fine looking, florid-faced man with a superb figure and gray side-whiskers after the manner of an English nobleman.

Billy at once handed the man his note, and that gentleman dropped into a chair and opened it. While he sat there the boy had a good opportunity to study him, and he improved it.

He saw a faint smile overspread the man's face as he read, and when he had finished the message he looked up at Billy with the paper lying open on the table.

"You're to take a message back? That's the way I understand this matter," he said, and then he drew writing materials toward him and began to write.

"Go on," said the boy to himself while he watched Van Loo. "The man at the restaurant told me nothing of the kind, but if you want to intrust me with a letter it's all right, Mr. Van Loo."

The person at the table finished his task, sealed what he had written and addressed it to "Spanker," thinking, no doubt, that the boy knew the rest.

"Take that to him, and here's something for your trouble," said the man, and a silver dollar rolled toward Billy Winks.

Billy smiled, bowed his acknowledgments and withdrew, but he had barely left the house ere Van Loo, looking again at the letter on the table, lost color and fairly flew to the door.

He had discovered that no answer was required and that he had committed a serious blunder in sending one.

But Billy Winks had cut around the corner and was out of sight and he had his curses for his pains.

"Gone with the letter!" growled the man, going back into the luxurious parlor. "I ought to be kicked across the continent. What if the boy opens that letter and is sharp enough to figure out what it means? Great Caesar! I'm a fool," and kicking an innocent cat half way across the parlor, he sat down, swearing more than ever.

Meantime Billy Winks, highly elated over something, was on the street with the letter received from Van Loo burning a hole in his inside pocket.

"I think I've picked up an important link," he chuckled. "It's almost as good as finding Chuck Holcomb, for I've an idea who this Van Loo is."

CHAPTER VII.

MASTER AND MAN.

It was later in the day when the sender of the note by Billy Winks, sitting in the cool parlor of the fine house on S— street, was aroused by the jingling of the bell in the hall, and when there stepped in the room the man who had met the boy detective in the restaurant, he gave vent to an exclamation of delight.

"Did you get my letter?" demanded Van Loo.

"What letter?" was the quick response, accompanied by a look of wonder.

"Why, the one I sent back by the boy who brought yours."

"Did you do that? If you had read my note carefully you would have seen that no answer was required. The truth is, I sent that message by one of these street Arabs and the chances are that I will never see him again."

Van Loo's countenance clouded and he gasped for breath.

"I did discover my mistake when it was too late; the boy was off and I could not overtake him."

"Oh, let it go," said the other in an off-hand way, though it was evident that he was somewhat disturbed over the blunder. "The boy will be looking for me at the restaurant, and I will drop down and wait in the neighborhood for him."

This seemed to relieve Van Loo and he took a cigar from the box on the table.

"When are we going to wind the thing up?" he asked with a glance at his visitor.

"Pretty soon with Holcomb where he won't be likely to give us further trouble."

"Be sure of that as you go along," was the interruption.

"I am. I guess Simon and I are equal to the emergency. I was looking at the girl again today. There can be no mistake, and the boy is the only one who really puzzles me."

"Is she really pretty?"

"She is very good-looking."

"A type-writer, you say?"

"Yes."

"Where does she work?"

"Up-stairs for Nuff & Fancy, No. — Broadway. She is the very image of the photograph you have shown me and if the boy looks any way like her, we will run across him, too. I have told Simon to keep his eyes open and in the course of time we will be ready to close on both of them."

"What about the old man?"

Spanker fell back in his chair and laughed.

"He's rattled here," he said, touching his forehead. "Yes, old Pappy Pink is as harmless as a kitten. He is all the time getting up queer looking inventions none of which will ever amount to anything, but, you see, it occupies his time and that is all he wants."

"But you had no trouble with him?"

"Not the least in the world. He went with me like a lamb, and when I told him that I would furnish all the money he wanted to carry out his plans he was eager to go. No one will miss him much but a boy on whom he calls occasionally—a bell boy at one of the minor hotels. Old Pink and the boy are pretty thick, and he is the only one who cared anything about the old man. He's comfortable and is willing to stay where he is till the trump of Judgment blows."

"I'm glad you succeeded so well with him," answered Van Loo with a self-satisfied smile. "We are getting along as satisfactorily as could be expected, I guess; but I am anxious to get back where I can be Blake Belden once more."

"You'll be going back ere long," was the assurance. "I will see to that. I have spotted the girl—I am sure of that, but the boy is the only drawback now."

"How far had Holcomb and his partner got?"

"Not very far. They had just struck the city and the trail had not been found. Chuck Holcomb is a shrewd man and we did well in getting hold of him in time."

So Van Loo was Blake Belden, the conspirator against the fortune due the Pettibone children, and Spanker was one of the agents mentioned to Billy Winks by Flash Phlox, Holcomb's pard.

This man, Belden, had come to New York himself so as to be near the scene of operations and his hand had directed the movements of his men, and was responsible for the capture of Chuck Holcomb and the disappearance of Pappy Pink, Billy's friend the inventor.

"When do you expect to draw the net on the girl?" he asked, after a pause of a few seconds.

"Just as soon as I get it spread to suit me," was the reply.

"Don't make a misplay."

"What! me make such a thing? I guess there's no danger."

"I'd like to see this type-writer just for luck. I would know her on sight."

There was no reply to this.

"Would it be dangerous for me to go down and wait till she came out of the building to go home?"

"I don't know. I have always told you that the best thing for all of us in this game is for you to lie low and not appear in it at all."

"I know that; but I would like to get a glimpse of the girl. You may have made a mistake—remember, I don't say you have—and none must be made. The wrong girl must not be netted."

"Well, if you promise to behave discreetly and not to give yourself away you may go down and watch for her. You want to get there just about six, for she comes down punctually and goes off home."

Van Loo, or Belden, glanced at his watch.

"I'll get ready now," said he. "It's nearing that time, and I am anxious for the little adventure."

Spanker sat in the parlor and smoked until

Van Loo came down-stairs looking quite different from his natural self, and when he announced that he was ready, both left the house.

"You want to be very careful," said Spanker, in low tones. "Remember that Phlox, the other one, is still at large and may be on the watch, though I have discovered that he has paid his bill and is no longer at the hotel. He is not as dangerous as Holcomb, who is the brains of the game against us, and I am not afraid of him."

"All right; I'll play my part of the game to perfection, and would suggest that while I am watching for the girl you go back to the restaurant and see if the boy has left that letter for you."

"A good idea, and I'll do it at once. You know where the office is!"

Van Loo hurried on and soon came opposite the building where Josie Jackson ran the typewriter.

It wanted a few minutes of six, and he stationed himself at a convenient spot and fell to watching the door.

In a short time there came tripping out of the tall building a graceful figure, at sight of which he uttered a sharp cry.

"That's the game!" he cried. "By Jericho! Spanker was right. She's as pretty as a picture. There's no mistake. We have found the very person we've been scouring the city for, and all we want now is the boy."

Josie, thinking of the man who had been in the habit of dogging her steps, threw a cautious glance around when she emerged from the house, but did not see Van Loo on the watch.

In another moment the man had started forward and with his eyes fastened on the girl, seemed to see no one else.

"Great Scot!" suddenly cried a voice at his elbow, and turning he beheld a youngish man staring at him with eyes that seemed on the eve of popping from his head.

In an instant Van Loo colored.

He saw at once that he had been discovered despite the clever mask he wore, but did not for a moment guess the identity of the other man.

"Here, you don't know me, I guess," and the speaker stepped forward. "Let me set your doubts at rest. You are Blake Belden and came to New York for a purpose. I want to know what your agents have done with Chuck Holcomb. There's no use mincing matters at this stage of the game. Where is he, I say?"

These words, spoken in a loud tone, reached the ears of Josie Jackson, and the girl, turning suddenly, saw that the speaker was the man Billy Winks had presented to her at her lodgings a few hours before.

Josie involuntarily stopped and looked at the pair. She saw the color leave Van Loo's face and in a moment had connected him with her own fortunes.

"I know nothing about your partner," cried Van Loo, madly. "I am an inoffensive gentleman and don't propose to be browbeaten on the street."

He went at Phlox as he spoke and a collision was imminent, but at that moment a boy ran between the pair and Phlox was thrown back.

"Don't get into a quarrel with that man, Phlox. That is Mr. Van Loo, and you don't want to waste time on him now."

"Billy Winks!" cried Phlox as he fell back.

"The very boy I want," exclaimed Van Loo, making a dart at the young ferret. "Here; where is that letter I gave you this morning?"

"Oh, it's all O. K.," grinned Billy. "I've delivered it."

"To whom?"

"Why, to Spanker, at the restaurant."

A look of relief crossed Van Loo's face and Billy Winks and Phlox at once vanished.

"That was the man," cried Phlox, catching hold of the boy's arm. "We have just had an encounter with Blake Belden, the head of the Golden Coil."

"Right you are, Phlox; but come with me. I want to show you the copy of a certain letter. I delivered the original to Spanker, but I took a copy all the same."

"You're worth your weight in gold," said the admiring Phlox; but Billy Winks laughed in reply.

"No, I'm all 'brass,' Phlox. But come and see."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GRIP OF THE GOLDEN COIL.

BILLY WINKS led Phlox to his little den in the house where he had lodged for several years and locking the door, opened a drawer and took out a piece of folded paper.

"I did it up as slick as I could," said he. "I went down-stairs to Mother Snipe's room and let

her steam the letter till it came open as nice as you please. It was a neat job and Mother Snipe seemed to go about it as though she had opened letters by that process before. I was delighted when she did the job, but of course did not show her the contents of the letter. Here is the copy I made; the other I took back to the restaurant where I found Spanker to whom I delivered it with him none the wiser for what I had done."

The boy detective spread before the eager Phlox the copy he spoke of and the man bent forward.

Billy, knowing what was in the letter, settled back in his chair and made a study of Phlox's face.

This is what he read:

"MY DEAR SAM:—

"I have your letter before me with its cheering news. Be sure to make no mistake, for if, as you say, you have tracked the girl down, one-half of the work is done. I will pay you the two thousand tomorrow when you call, and then we will go back to Jersey provided you bring me more encouraging news. You were lucky to catch the tall man; now, if you can entrap the other one as well, with what you have done with the old one, we shall be on the top wave of success and need fear no further trouble. I say again, Sam, make no mistake. The boy is in the city if the girl is. Silence is the only safe course and you know that dead people never give one any anxiety. Don't fail. I have more than enough to pay you all and you know the pledge. B. B."

Phlox's eyes were aglow with excitement when he looked up at Billy Winks.

"It was a find sure enough," said he. "It settles one point beyond doubt. Van Loo, the man who gave you the original letter, is Blake Belden the conspirator."

"That is right."

"He is bound to deal harshly with the Pettibone children. If he can help it they shall never touch a dollar of the estate rightfully theirs. He has come to this city for that purpose. He and his men, Spanker and Simon Short, are at work and this letter tells us how far along they have got. They have netted both Chuck Holcomb, my partner, and Pappy Pink, for he certainly is the 'old man' mentioned in this infamous letter."

"Right you are again, Phlox. The old inventor has fallen into the toils. You remember that he wrote the letter to Chuck which took him from the Metropolitan the night he disappeared. You don't think now that the old man was a decoy?"

"I do not. He must have known Holcomb, however, and had some news for us."

Phlox took up the letter and read it again.

"Van Loo, or Belden, was foolish to write such a letter," he said.

"Yes, and I think he regretted it before I was gone far for I saw him at the door just as I turned the corner, but I didn't go back; not very much!"

"But look here. They say they have found the girl."

"So the letter reads."

"Belden was watching Josie when I came across him and he gave me such a shock that I couldn't keep from betraying myself."

"Which was very foolish in you, Phlox."

"I know it, but the first thing that came up in my mind was the vanishment of Chuck, and I could not keep my hands off him. That man is Blake Belden and no mistake, and we will have to look out with him in the city directing the game. The chances are that Holcomb has been murdered somewhere, and if the girl falls into the grip of the Golden Coil, she will not fare very well."

Billy said nothing for a moment; but Phlox saw his eyes twinkling across the table.

"Phlox," suddenly said the boy detective, "I was thinking about something."

"Well?"

"Did you ever see a photograph of the missing children?"

"A thousand times. We brought one to the city with us."

"Where is it?"

"At my room."

"Where is that now?"

"Down on Mulberry."

"I would like to see that photograph, Phlox."

"When, Billy?"

"Now."

The next minute the pair were on the sidewalk, the copy of the important letter having been put away again.

Phlox in quitting the hotel had taken up humble quarters where he was not likely to be found by the men who had netted his friend and fellow-worker, Chuck, and he led Billy to the place.

In a little while Phlox laid before the boy a

photograph of two small children taken in their childish clothes. They were standing together, the girl a mite the tallest.

"Copies of that picture have been circulated all over the country. They have gone to Europe, but nothing has been heard of the children. I have told you, Billy, that the father, John Pettibone, is supposed to have perished in the ruins of his home and that the children were abducted that same night. You see the estate was worth thousands and under Blake Belden's control it has nearly doubled in value and is to-day one of the richest places in Jersey."

Billy Winks was looking at the photograph while Phlox talked and when he handed it back he smiled and said:

"Phlox, what do you think?"

The man looked at a loss what to say.

"I mean what is your opinion of the girl these rascals have tracked?"

"I guess my opinion is the same as yours."

"Out with it, Phlox."

"That missing girl is Josie."

In an instant Billy was half-way across the table and his hand had dropped into Phlox's palm.

"You've hit my opinion to a T!" he cried. "Josie is not Josie Jackson but Josie Pettibone! Now, look here, Phlox! Everything goes to show this. Spanker is the man who has dogged her footsteps for three months. He follows her to and from work and once or twice he has been caught looking in at her window. Then, the next thing we see is Belden himself on the watch. They have closed in on Holcomb; they have got old Pappy Pink in the toils, and now they want to find the boy before they wind up the whole rascally game by one big play."

"That's it!" cried Phlox.

"Not a word about this to Josie," continued Billy Winks. "She must not know what we think; time enough yet for that. We are to baffle this gang of villains. The girl will be watched so long as they can keep an eye on her. I know Josie. Some-how-or-other, she is willing to take my advice in everything. She must get out of the shadow at once. Josie must go!"

"Give up the type-writing job, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Will she do it?"

"If danger threatens she will do anything. She fears the man who has been watching her. I will see her at once."

This being determined on between Billy and Phlox, the two left the house and after promising to come together again two hours later on, the Bell Boy Detective went toward Josie's home.

"It's a deep game," he said to himself as he flitted through the shadows. "This is more exciting than playing bell boy at the Metropole. I am almost sure Josie is the missing child of the Pettibones and in time we will run across the boy and some day astonish Mr. Blake Belden and make him jump out of his boots. I won't let on to Josie what is up, but she shall know that it is best for her to quit the old rooms at once and give up type-writing till the clouds roll by. I'm going to stand by her, and Nelse needn't be jealous, either."

Billy thought over what he would say to the pretty type-writer and when he ran up the stair and rapped on the door he had his plans laid.

There was no response to his raps, and rapping louder than before he waited a moment longer and then tried the knob.

But the door was locked and would not yield.

"I never knew her to go out after coming home from work," said he with a little white suddenly appearing on his face. "I don't believe anything has happened to her, though she is watched by as precious a lot of scoundrels as ever drew a breath."

All at once he heard a footstep and the next instant saw standing before him a woman with a lank figure and peaked face.

He took it for granted at once that he was looking at a tenant of one of the other rooms.

"The girl I suppose you are hunting isn't at home," said the woman.

"I want to see Miss Jackson."

"Yes, but she went off awhile ago with a gentleman."

Billy started.

"Not with Nelse! Do you know Nelse?" he said.

"Nelse is the young gentleman who calls now and then? I know him. But that wasn't the man who escorted Miss Jackson from the house."

"My God!" cried Billy, covering the distance between himself and the woman at a bound. "What sort of man was he? You must have seen him from what you say?"

"I caught a glimpse of him as they went downstairs," was the reply. "He was tall, had a

good figure and wore a mustache which drooped over his mouth. He was dressed in dark clothes and had hold of Miss Jackson's arm."

"The infernal villain!" cried Billy. "How long have they been gone?"

"Not twenty minutes."

For a second Billy Winks stood like one thunderstruck in the hallway.

He had received the greatest shock of his life.

He had come too late to help Josie.

She had fallen into the power of the Golden Coil; the plot had found its victim.

CHAPTER IX.

BLED.

THE identity of the man known as Burton Van Loo was no longer a question with the Bell Boy Detective. He was none other than Blake Belden, the person who was enjoying the proceeds of the rich Pettibone estate over in Jersey—an estate which had passed into his hands through the strange will left behind by John Pettibone, who was supposed to have perished in the fire that wiped out his home.

Pettibone was a widower at the time of the fire, but had two children who vanished the same night, and of whom from that time nothing had been heard.

It was true, as Flash Phlox had told Billy Winks, that, unless the children were found within a given time the estate would become the permanent property of Blake Belden, hence the man's desire to prevent the boy and girl from turning up to plague him.

There were some who believed that the little ones were taken off the night of the fire by a wandering band of Gypsies who were in the neighborhood, but the tramps had been followed by a detective in the pay of interested people, without results.

Blake Belden, we need call him Van Loo no longer, since his true identity is fully known, went home after his encounter with Phlox on the sidewalk with singular thoughts. He had seen Josie Jackson, and the sight of the pretty type-writer had thrilled him.

He was confident that he had looked upon one of the Pettibone heirs, and while seated in his parlor, he waited with impatience for the coming of the tool called Spanker.

No one in Jersey knew what had become of Belden. All missed him from the elegant home there, but none knew that he was in New York directing one of the coolest conspiracies against two young people, only one of whom had, as yet, been found.

He knew that an enemy had hired Holcomb and Phlox and sent them to the trail for the purpose of baffling him, but he was more than that enemy's match, and had resolved not to come off second best.

If Belden could have seen Billy Winks in the hall-way of Josie's home extracting information from the peaked-face woman he might have formed another opinion of the boy detective, but this sight was not for him.

Spanker dropped in at last, with a smile on his face.

"Well, one's safely in the net," he said, unable to conceal his delight.

Blake Belden almost sprung from his chair.

"Which one have you netted, Spanker?"

"The girl, of course."

"Not the pretty type-writer?"

"Josie!"

The next moment Belden put his hand across the table and seized the one on the other side.

"Any trouble, Sam?"

"None to speak of. She went along almost as quietly as the old man did."

"You're a trump."

"I thought you knew that before."

"So I did, but you are two trumps."

"That will do better," grinned the rascal's tool. "Now that we have her safely housed—"

"Where is she?" eagerly asked Belden.

"You must let me keep that secret for the present. There must be no blunders in this game, and the fewer the sharers of the secret the surer will be its keeping."

The man in the arm-chair bit his lips, but was compelled to accede to his agent's wishes.

"The next one is the boy," he said.

"Yes."

"Haven't you no clew concerning him? Don't the girl know anything about her brother?"

"I haven't asked her yet. When I left her she was in no mood for talking to me, and I thought I would let her cool down a little."

"A wise plan, Sam. But does she suspect the truth?"

"No! she had never heard of the Pettibones from what hints I dropped just to try her, but

she is the right girl all the same, and we have the fly safely in the golden web."

For a few moments Blake Belden sat at the table and drummed thereon with the tips of his white fingers.

"I'll take a little money now."

"Certainly," acquiesced Belden, with a start.

He crossed the room to a safe in one corner and threw back the steel door, revealing something that made Spanker's eyes glitter.

"How much?"

"Five thousand."

"What!" and Blake Belden turned upon Spanker, with eyes widened with amazement.

"Five thousand. Do you think I am going to take all the risk for nothing? Why, you are the one who will reap the harvest, and you must remember that Simon and I are the ones who are risking our necks that you may sit at your ease, and get your clutches on the biggest estate in Jersey."

Spanker spoke coolly, and with his eyes on the open safe, and Belden evidently saw that he was in the villain's grip, for he laid his hand on a pile of bills.

"The next time it will be ten thousand, won't it?" he queried, coming back to the table.

"Never mind what it will be. What would it amount to, anyway? Why, fifty thousand wouldn't make a hole in the pile, and here you are kicking on five!"

Spanker subsided and watched Belden count out the bills and when the last one had fallen on the table he put out his soft hand and raked them in.

"Are you sure the girl won't get out?" asked Belden.

Sam Spanker fell back in his chair and burst into a laugh.

"I'm no fool, Blake Belden. I know where my neck is now, and if you think I have left a loophole you are the worst fooled man on this island. Safe? I should say she is safe."

"The boy who came between me and Phlox gave me a shock—I don't know why."

"Probably because you acted the fool and gave him a letter to carry to me."

"It was the same boy."

"And I got the letter—a very foolish one for you to intrust to anybody. Don't you know that a letter can be steamed and so adroitly opened that the game can't be detected?"

"But mine wasn't treated that way?"

"I hope not."

"Did you look at it?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I couldn't detect anything wrong."

"It's all right, then."

"Don't you ever commit another blunder like that," warned the tool.

Belden's very looks promised that he wouldn't.

"I would like to know where the girl is," he said. "Not that I don't think she is safe, but I would like to talk with her—"

"And put her on her guard? If you want to see any one go and talk to Pappy Pink."

But Belden seemed to shrink within himself.

"I'd rather see the girl," he answered.

Sam Spanker smiled, but made no reply. He had the five thousand dollars in crisp notes in his pocket and picking up his hat, strode toward the door.

"Oh," said he, stopping suddenly, "I forgot something."

He came back, at the same time looking sharply into Belden's face.

"Do you recollect Betsy Snipe?"

"Heavens, yes! You haven't found her, too, I hope?"

"I believe I have," replied the other. "She was the half-witted servant who lived with the Pettibones at the time of the fire. She went off a few days before the event and from that time to this has never been heard of. If I am not mistaken the woman is here in New York."

Blake Belden listened in no easy frame of mind.

"It seems to me that all have gathered together here. Betsy Snipe is a woman I would like to see; but you may not have found her after all."

"Well, then, I have seen her counterpart—a hatchet-faced thing as sharp as a brier and for all the world like the same Betsy Snipe who has been accused of carrying off the Pettibone children."

"Where is this creature?"

"Down on the Bowery."

"Living alone?"

"Yes, but in a human bee-hive."

"What does she do for a living?"

"I don't know."

"Give me her number."

This Sam Spanker did without hesitation, and when he left the house Blake Belden stood in the middle of the room looking at the paper with careful eyes.

"What if it is the same woman?" he said aloud. "What if this is the same Betsy Snipe—the creature who did me a favor years and years ago?"

He went back into his private room, put on a hat he seldom wore, crushed it down over his forehead, put a pistol in his pocket and went out.

"I must see this woman at once—before Sam Spanker sees her again," he decided, and then hurried away on his mission.

CHAPTER X.

"KEEP OUT OF THAT MAN'S WAY."

LITTLE did the head of the Golden Coil suspect while he threaded the streets of New York that he was going to the same house occupied by Billy Winks.

He was bent on meeting the woman called Betsy Snipe, not dreaming that she was so near the boy destined to play such a part in the fell conspiracy against the Pettibone fortune.

He reached the house and looked up at it some time before he made up his mind to enter.

When he rung he was confronted by a girl who in reply to his question told him where Betsy Snipe was to be found and in a moment Belden was mounting the flight to her room.

Three minutes later the man stood looking into the little eyes and peaked face of the woman who had opened his letter for Billy Winks.

"Are you Betsy Snipe?" he asked.

"That's who I am and no mistake," responded the woman, in shrewish tones. "I've been Betsy Snipe for fifty-nine years and I guess I'll remain the same person to the end."

She was looking into the plotter's face as if it recalled the past and all at once she fell back with a cry.

"I know you now! In the name of heaven, when did you turn up?"

"Hush!" warned Belden, springing forward and seizing her wrist. "I don't want to be known here and it is to your interest to keep a still tongue in your head."

Making no reply Betsy Snipe stood off and gazed at the man.

"You live alone here, don't you?" Belden asked.

"Yes, alone."

"How long have you been living in the city?"

"Nearly seventeen years. I came here soon after— You know what, Blake Belden."

"I understand you. In all that time no one has recognized you?"

"I didn't care to be recognized."

"Yet you didn't drop your name?"

"No. I thought too much of my dead husband to do that. I am true to the memory of Jack Snipe ever to give up his name for any cause. You look a little older and I suppose you are rolling in clover."

"Moderately so," answered Belden, looking at the woman with more and more intensity. "I want to ask you, Betsy"—and he lowered his voice—"what ever became of them?"

In an instant the face of the woman seemed to change.

"I don't know," she said firmly.

As she spoke she averted her gaze and tried to look away.

"You were said to have taken them off the night of the fire because of some slight John Pettibone put upon you."

"I didn't like him—that's a fact; there was no love between us. They accuse me of taking the children off, do they? Well, if they hadn't been abducted don't you think they'd have escaped the fire?"

Blake Belden was trying to keep back something that seemed to struggle to his lips.

"I know you did it, Betsy Snipe," he said.

"You did not carry out my instructions."

"I didn't have to," snapped the woman with fire in the depths of her eyes.

The man glared at her with the mien of a human tiger.

"Listen to me, Blake Belden, since you have taken pains to hunt me up," she went on. "I haven't seen you for years and have hoped that we would never meet again. Are you still after the children? Aren't you satisfied with what fell to your lot? I know you have had the enjoyment of the fortune all these years—that you are even now 'rolling in clover,' as they say. If I knew where the children were do you think I would tell you? Do you think that Betsy Snipe, who once helped you to the wealth you have now, would betray them? You have come to the wrong house; you have sought out the wrong

woman. I haven't many years to live, but I won't add another blot to my life."

She stood before Blake Belden with her angular figure drawn to its full height, and he almost recoiled from the angry flashes of the sunken eyes. Betsy Snipe could be a tigress when aroused.

"Who told you I live here?" she demanded.

"One of your paid spies, I'll be bound. Yes, I've been leading an honest life these many years, but there is one thing I can't forget and that is the past. If you want any information I have none for you. I don't give up my secrets. I guess they look like their mother, ha, ha, ha!"

The woman's laugh seemed to chill him.

"You do know where they are!" he cried.

"I haven't said so."

"No, but you have just intimated as much."

"Just as you please," and Betsy laughed in his face. "The boy especially resembles his mother."

"Thunder and guns!" cried Belden, reaching for the woman's arm, but she backed out of his way. "You know all about them. You did steal them that night, but you failed to carry out my instructions. You took my money, you was glad enough to get that—"

"Well, you had enough and to spare, didn't you?"

A quick movement on his part and he had the woman in his grip though she tried to squirm out of it, but failed.

"I'll shriek if you don't let go," she warned.

"I am still Betsy Snipe; but there's no murder in my heart any more."

He looked at her and grated his teeth, but dropped the arm he had taken and looked savagely at the woman.

"You won't tell me?"

"I won't. I want to die here without being any man's agent. I won't tell you what I know."

"They are here—in this city?"

There was no reply.

"You don't have things in plenty here," he went on, glancing around the room.

"You are right. Sometimes I am pinched for the necessary things of this life. I have known what it is to shiver through a long winter and even now I am very poor, but I don't want another dollar of your money—not a copper of it!"

"You needn't get so independent; I haven't offered you any yet."

"But you did once and I took it! It burned a hole in my soul, too. It brought me lower than the angels who fell from heaven. It caloused the better nature of Betsy Snipe, and made her too contemptible to be noticed by her fellow humans."

"Very well; stay here and starve when there are riches at your door," he snapped and started as if to go.

"I can do that; I've done it before," she answered. "Starving's nothing new to Betsy Snipe."

He opened the door and looked out into the hall, when, all of a sudden he returned, his eyes fairly blazing.

"Don't you ever try to betray me," he hissed.

"Don't you ever sell me out, Betsy Snipe."

She merely laughed at him.

"Sell you out?" she cried. "I don't want to handle any money that would be in any way connected with you. Get out of my room! Bad as I am, your presence stains the floor I tread."

He went toward the door again; this time he stepped out into the hall, when she slammed the portal in his face as she bade him begone!

She was a picture of rage, and when he was gone she stood in the middle of the apartment and shook her skeleton fists at him.

"Sell you out?" she cried, repeating her own words. "I would like to do it for I know you would dance on a gallows; but I won't, no, not yet, at any rate."

Betsy was locking her door against a recurrence of the visit, when some one seemed to reach it.

"Mother Snipe?" called a voice from the outside.

In an instant the door flew open and there stood Billy Winks, the boy ferret.

"You, Billy Winks?" cried the woman, bending down and looking into the sparkling eyes of the young shadow. "What on airth brings you here at this time o' night? You haven't got another letter for me to steam, have you?"

"Not that, Mother Snipe; but I'm here on important business just the same."

"Well?"

"You have just had a visitor. A man has just quitted this house. He came here to see you and you alone, Mother Snipe. I want to know who he is and why he should come to see you."

For a moment the eyes of Betsy Snipe seemed to avoid those that glistened in the boy detective's head; but, all at once, as they got a new light, she caught his arm and drew him forward.

All the fierceness of her nature had vanished and her look was now soft and full of pity.

"Billy, my boy, I wish you wouldn't ask such questions," she said. "I do, indeed. There was a man here. He came to see me. I used to know him."

"You, Mother Snipe?" cried Billy Winks.

"God pity me, I used to know him!" was the reply. "You have been listening. You may have heard what he said to me. There! don't ask me another question; but let me say, whatever you do, keep out of that man's way!"

CHAPTER XI.

MR. PHLOX SHOTS.

BILLY WINKS was inclined to laugh at Betsy Snipe's warning.

"Is he dangerous, Mother Snipe?" he asked.

"To you, doubly dangerous," was the emphasized reply. "I think a good deal of you, Billy, and I don't want you to fall into the clutches of a man tiger like that. There! don't let me talk any more on this subject; but, mind what I've told you. Keep out of his power!"

Finding that on the subject now nearest his heart Mrs. Snipe had ceased to be communicative, the boy detective withdrew and went back to his own quarters.

He had something to think about, for not only had he discovered that Betsy Snipe was an old acquaintance of Blake Belden's, but he had overheard a part of the conversation that passed between the two and had learned something of the woman's past.

Not only this, but he had found out a little more about the lost Pettibone children, and by putting it with what Phlox had seen fit to communicate, he thought he had picked up a very important link in the chain.

Belden left Mrs. Snipe's house in no enviable frame of mind. The woman had not helped him any, and he resolved that she should not carry out any threat.

"She knows where the boy is, at any rate," said he. "We have the girl fast enough and all we want to complete the job is to run across the other. Betsy Snipe, you will have to be watched. Spanker would not tell me where the girl is but advised me if I wanted to interview any one to hunt up old Pink and see him. I will do nothing of the kind. I don't care about the old man and his crazy inventions and I won't lose any time with him."

Meantime the boy detective had left the house and gone down on the street.

The sudden disappearance of Josie Jackson troubled him not a little.

He was sure, from what he had learned from the woman in the house occupied by the pretty type-writer that she had been spirited away by Spanker, and since discovering, as he thought he had, that she was one of the Pettibone children, he was more than ever anxious to find her.

Wondering if Phlox had discovered anything new, Billy Winks went over to that young gentleman's lodgings and found him in a perturbed state of mind.

"Look here; this is the way they strike a fellow," cried Phlox, the moment he caught sight of the young ferret.

At the same time he handed Billy a note, which he said he found on his table when he came back to the room after a walk, and the boy read as follows:

"If you know what is good for yourself you will get out of this city at once. Don't raise any alarm, for we know what we are about, and we don't intend to be beaten by a man of your stripe. It is worth your life to remain here another day. By order of
"THE GOLDEN COIL."

"That means business," said Phlox when Billy looked up with a smile on his face.

"They seem to have it in for you, Phlox," was the answer.

"Yes; and I've been thinking that the best thing I can do is to obey that warning and get out of town. I want to live to a green old age."

"And you expect to get to that point by playing coward at the start? Look here, Phlox, my boy: Do you intend to abandon Chuck Holcomb to his fate?"

"I don't want to, that's a fact, but a man must look out for Number One, you know."

"That's right, but Chuck is in the grip of this same Golden Coil, and it's our duty to find him."

"I'm afraid it can't be done."

"That hasn't been tried yet to any extent. I know that he isn't in the house where I believe

I located him the night I went down into a dark cellar. They've taken him elsewhere—"

"If they haven't finished him."

"Of course."

"And Pappy Pink has vanished, and now you tell me that the girl Josie is gone?"

Billy Winks made no reply.

"All this knocks me silly," continued Phlox. "I did not expect to fight such an enemy when I undertook this mission along with Chuck. It is simply irresistible."

"Well," said Billy, looking at the man a moment, "go, if you want to, Phlox."

"No, I won't. I won't run off and leave you to fight the league alone. I wouldn't do that for the world because I like your grit and, then, I'm interested in the girl. I am going to stay if I lose my head by it. I'm with you, Billy."

Phlox put forth his hand and Billy took it with pleasure and smiled on the fellow. He did not have a very high opinion of Phlox's bravery, but he thought he would fight well if cornered and told him that they would work together and see if they could not baffle the Golden Coil.

"Dead or alive, I would like to know what has become of Chuck," said Phlox.

"We shall know in time."

"But how are you going to strike his trail?"

"Leave that to me. I overheard a conversation to-night which promises to lead to results and I shall follow up that clew."

"Don't let anything escape you for Heaven's sake. We must outwit the Coil or fall into its power."

"That's very evident. But, Phlox, why does the man who employed you and Chuck to ferret out the missing Pettibone children hate Blake Belden?"

"It's an old grudge, I guess. At any rate, Chuck used to say so."

"Where does he live?"

"Over in Jersey."

"Near Belden?"

"Yes. His name is Tipps—Tolliver Tipps, and he is a man who never lets up on any one when he has a pick at them. He is rich, and we were to get three thousand for finding the children."

"But they are grown now, that is if they are living."

"Yes."

"Were there no marks on them?"

"The girl had a pretty little mole on one arm and the boy—"

Phlox stopped and drew one hand across his forehead to brighten his memory.

"Well, what about the boy?"

"I don't know as he had any distinguishing mark," was the response. "Wait! He was hurt while playing, fell off of something and the fall left a scar, but that was years ago and scars sometimes disappear, you know."

Billy nodded.

"Which way now?" asked Phlox when the young detective picked up his hat.

"I am off on the trail. You can do what you like best, Phlox—remain here or go out; but if you do the latter, keep your eyes open and look out for the Coil."

The next moment Phlox was alone in his room and shaking his head, he exclaimed:

"That last was a good piece of advice. Look out for the Coil!"

He went to the window and looked down into the street. All at once he saw a man cross it opposite the house and looking at him a moment he fell back and bolted the door.

"Curse it all, I believe the Coil has found me out already!" he almost gasped. "I think I know that man. It is the tall fellow I saw on the street to-day, and he nearly looked me through. I wish I hadn't taken part in this case. I had no business to, but listened to Chuck and was lured into it by a display of Tolliver Tipps's cash. It's going to end both of us; it's ended Chuck already, and here I am in the shadow of the same death."

Phlox stood in the room waiting for the man he had seen come up-stairs. He had locked the door, but did not expect that precautionary measure to save his neck.

Presently, just as he predicted in his mind, footsteps came up the hall steps and he fixed his eyes on the door. The revolver shook in his grip.

Phlox counted the steps as they approached his door and when they ceased, he fairly held his breath.

In a little while gentle raps were heard and with welded lips and a gleam of madness in his eye, Phlox went forward and opened the door.

The man he had seen cross the street in the gas-light stood before him!

Quick as a flash Phlox raised the pistol and

holding it in the man's face as well as he could for his shaky hand, he fired at point-blank range without a word of explanation.

Phlox looked once and no more, then slammed his door and bolting it, fell nerveless into a chair and let the pistol slide from his grip to the floor.

"What if I've killed him?" he thought. "He was coming for me; they have tracked me down and I was to share the fate of Holcomb. I had a right to kill that man. It was self-defense. But, heavens! what a hubbub I've raised."

Sure enough the whole house was in an uproar, and when Phlox ventured to look into the hall he saw a crowd at the foot of the stairs.

"What's that?—not to be found?" he cried when he had listened a moment. "Why, I held the revolver in his face."

It was true; the man fired at was gone, and when poor Phlox realized this he went back to the chair trembling more than ever.

"I must vanish now or perish in the Golden Coil," he gasped, and that moment he vowed to get out of the game.

By and by he questioned one of the parties on the steps and learned that the man he had fired at was not to be found.

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY WINKS SCORES A RUN.

TWO days have passed since the somewhat exciting events detailed in the chapter just ended.

In a little room, the windows of which, from the way they are protected by cross-bars of iron, indicate that it is the prison of some person, sits a man who is at work on a queer-looking machine on a table before him.

He bends over the board and works steadily, never looking up but seemingly absorbed in the task that takes up his time.

He is the sole occupant of the dull chamber and not a sound is heard but the occasional click of his tools.

Presently the old man holds his work at arm's length and admires it.

"That's the beauty that will make my fortune!" he said. "I have hit it at last, and when I go out of this house I will be one of the richest inventors in the world. Edison won't be nowhere and Menlo Park will sink into insignificance before the works I will erect. The gentleman who is furnishing me with money will be my silent partner and I will buy myself a palace to live in. I have to keep shut up here with bars at the windows to keep rival inventors out. Ha, ha! that was an excellent idea of my friend's; but I wonder if Chuck Holcomb ever got the note I took to the Metropolitan for him? I wish I could have seen him."

Here the speaker stops suddenly and goes back to his work.

All at once he is disturbed by a light tapping, which seems to come from one of the closed windows, and dropping the model he crosses the cell-like room.

"Who's there?" he asks, leaning close to the window.

"Me, Pappy Pink."

"Gods! I believe it's Billy Winks!" exclaimed the worker, falling back with consternation on his face. "How on earth did he ever find me?"

"Are you going to let me in?"

"Yes, Billy, just as soon as I can."

The person outside was told how to reach a certain door which the old man opened, and in a little while he stood in the presence of the only Pappy Pink in New York.

"How did you find me, anyhow?" laughed the inventor, looking into the pleased and sparkling face of the boy detective. "I've thought a thousand times of you and wondered what had become of you. You see, I am not in the old quarters, but have sought other, where I am safe from the spies who want to steal my inventions. My new partner says it wasn't good to remain where I was for fear of them, and so I went off with him. I sent you a letter by him once, to tell you where I was; but I suppose he hasn't had time to deliver it."

Billy could not keep back a laugh.

"Of course a pressure of private business prevented the delivery of your letter," he said. "But, who is your partner, Pappy Pink?"

"A tall man, with the blackest eyes you ever saw."

"Sam Spanker, the cute rascal!" inwardly ejaculated the Bell Boy Detective. "A partner. Yes, of course. They've made old Pink believe all this stuff, and they don't intend to let him out."

"See here, Pappy Pink," he said aloud. "Do you know why Chuck Holcomb never got your letter?"

The old man started.

"No, I don't. I always thought it queer that he didn't turn up."

"You had something to tell him, hadn't you?"

"I had."

"How did you happen to know him?"

"I can't tell you just now, my head is so full of inventions; but I knew Chuck—knew him over in Jersey."

"Did you ever live in Jersey, Pappy Pink?"

"I—I think I did once."

"I want you to be sure of it."

"Why?"

"Because it is important."

"Ha! important, is it?" and Pappy Pink bent forward till his nose almost touched the boy ferret's face.

"It is very important, because it may help to throw light on a very dark case."

"How's that?"

"I can't stop to explain just now. You knew Chuck Holcomb over in Jersey? Did you ever hear of the Pettibone children?"

For a moment the old man stared vacantly at Billy Winks, then reason seemed to dawn on him, and he looked at the boy with quite a different expression.

"The Pettibones, did you say?" he asked.

"Yes, John Pettibone's children."

"I knew John Pettibone."

"And Blake Belden?"

This name seemed to throw Pappy Pink into a rage. He fell back a pace and then sprung forward with more agility than the boy had ever seen him use, and the next moment Billy Winks felt a pair of hands at his collar.

"Where is he?" he cried. "Where is Blake Belden? Know him? Of course I do! That name sometimes comes between me and my inventions, and I can't shake it off. Where is he, I say? In the city?"

"Don't fly off the handle like that," protested the boy, in soothing tones. "I am working a lay myself, and I don't want to be overheard in this house. When will your partner come to see you?"

"He drops in every now and then."

"Will he come to night?"

"He is liable to."

"Look here, Pappy Pink: you seem to have a very distinct recollection of Blake Belden; so have I, and if you will come with me you will hear more of him, and have a chance to pay him back."

"How do you know I want to pay him back for anything?"

"That's as plain as the nose on your face," grinned Billy Winks. "I don't want to meet your partner here, and if he has promised to help you on with your inventions, he is simply lying, and you are in a trap!"

"A trap, is it?" said Pappy Pink. "Why, he wouldn't set a trap for an old man like me."

"I know him; but if you want to go back on Billy Winks and take the word of a smart rascal instead of his, all right. I sha'n't argue the case. You recollect Josie? Well, she has fallen into a trap set by this same rascal, and he is the tool of a man who is working against the Pettibone children; he is simply Blake Belden's right bower."

"My partner?" cried Pappy Pink, beginning to realize the truth.

"Sam Spanker, your rascally partner, as he calls himself just to hoodwink you. What are you going to do?—remain here in one of Blake Belden's traps or go back with me—Billy Winks, a friend at all times?"

It was evident that the boy's last words carried great weight with them, for no sooner had they been spoken than his hand was seized by Pappy Pink and warmly squeezed.

"Go back with Billy Winks? Of course I will!" he cried. "He's the one I can trust."

"Pack up then and off we are."

The little old man proceeded to get his traps together at once, and when he stood ready with an old fashioned traveling sack in his hand, he said cunningly to the waiting boy:

"How did you smoke me out?"

"Never mind; that's one of my tricks," was the reply.

It did not take the pair long to reach the street. Billy Winks was anxious to quit the place, for he did not want to encounter Sam Spanker, the sharp, who was liable to come to the house at any moment, and when they were some distance from the place he hailed a cab and Pappy Pink was soon inside.

"This is stealing a march on the Golden Coil," said the boy to himself. "I thought I had struck it when I ran across the boy who saw a tall fellow escorting an old man down that street. I will hold on to Pappy Pink, for he's worth something as a trump card, and, if I can

help it, he will make no more models under Sam Spanker's eye."

Billy was cute enough to dismiss the cab some distance from the place he had picked out for the old man, and after awhile he sat before Pappy Pink, questioning him about his acquaintance with Blake Belden.

By and by recollection resumed its throne and he was surprised to hear from Pappy Pink's lips the whole inside history of that man's life.

"Billy Winks, it seems to me sometimes that I haven't always been Pappy Pink," he said.

"I don't think you have been."

"Every now and then I seem to hear the voices of children, and once or twice on the streets I have stopped little ones and taken them up in my arms, as though I used to have little tots of my own."

The boy detective was watching the old man and saw how his own words had affected him.

"I think there was a fire connected with my life, but just where it comes in is a mystery," continued the old inventor. "I used to know a woman who fell out with me and threatened to work my ruin. That much is pretty distinct now since you have talked to me to-night."

Billy Winks leaned toward Pappy Pink in his eagerness.

"Was her name Betsy Snipe?" he asked.

The name of the angular woman seemed to stagger the old inventor.

"That is it. Her name was Snipe!" he cried.

For a moment Billy Winks sat spellbound before the strange man.

"What sort of mystery am I about to unravel now?" he asked himself. "Pappy Pink says there is a fire connected with his existence and he once knew Betsy Snipe. He has been in the trap of the Golden Coil, and Blake Belden and Spanker know who the man is. Heavens! I wonder—I can't help it—I wonder if this man I have known so long is John Pettibone himself?"

Billy looked once more at Pappy Pink and saw him dive one hand into the depths of the big carpet-sack. The next moment he fished up his latest invention and went to work on it without another word.

"Whoever he had been, he was 'Pappy' Pink once more."

CHAPTER XIII. A PLUCKY GIRL.

THERE was some uneasiness at the office where Josie Jackson worked the type-writer when she did not appear as usual.

A messenger was sent to her lodgings to come back with the information that the girl had gone off, no one knew where, and another type-writer was secured in her place.

About the hour of Billy Winks's adventure with Pappy Pink, a tall, good-looking man opened the door of a well-to-do house on a quiet street and locked it after him.

He went up stairs with cat-like tread and at the top of the flight knocked on a door which, after the moving of a bolt, was opened to him.

He stood on the threshold of a neat room, and in the light stood a beautiful girl who looked at him with evident distrust.

Without an invitation the man entered the apartment and quietly took a seat, all the while looking at the girl who had closed the door.

"Well, how are you getting along?" asked the man.

In reply to his question there was a light smile, but the face of the girl almost instantly paled.

"This is not the old house," she said. "It is not the old home by any means and I want to go back."

The man in the chair gave her a cold look.

"You do, eh?" he grinned. "Why, I thought you promised to try to like this place."

"But I can't."

"You will in time. There is a splendid future for you if you only knew it."

"I was happy enough as it was. I don't want anything more than I had. I was earning my bread by the sweat of my brow, and no one ought to be afraid to do that, so long as it is done honestly."

There was no reply, the man was looking at her as if laying some mischievous plan in his head.

"We can make a pile if we would put our heads together and work in unison."

The girl—Josie Jackson—seemed to recoil, but she did not remove her gaze from the man before her.

"What do you mean sir?" she instantly demanded.

"I say you're worth your weight in gold if you only knew it," he went on.

"I don't want to know it then, for I see that you have sinister motives."

"Ho, sinister motives?" laughed the other, who was Spanker of the Golden Coil. "I know what you are worth, and all you have to do is to say that you will play fair with me and we will make it pay."

"I will do nothing of the kind. I want to go back to my old rooms. I want to return to the type-writer. I was happy there; here you must know I am not."

"You ought to take advantage of the offer I am ready to make."

Josie seemed to look him through.

"Go on," she commanded, sharply.

All at once the eyes of Spanker glowed with anticipation. The girl was "coming round."

"I know a secret that will lift you on the top wave of riches, and place you forever beyond want," he went on. "All you will have to do will be to act under my instructions, and they will be easy to follow. The fortune is ready for your hand, and besides, no one will ever dare to dispute your right to it."

He paused as if to note the effect of his words, and seeing that Josie was waiting for him to go on, he proceeded:

"I know all the ropes of the case, which one to pull, and when. There is no danger, no failure. We have the game in our hands. We can secure the prize by a sudden play, and you will be the richest young girl in Jersey."

"Why do you say Jersey?" asked the young type-writer.

"Because there's where the fortune is. You see, it belongs in that State, but it is near enough to New York to let you live here in clover. It's a big scheme, and can be worked so nicely."

"But I was satisfied where I was. I don't want to be burdened with wealth. I am content to be plain Josie Jackson, type-writer for Naff & Fancy."

"You're a queer creature," laughed Spanker. "But, see here: there is another phase of this matter. You are in danger unless you take hold of the matter with me."

In an instant all color left the girl's face.

"I am in danger, am I?" she cried. "I am to be thrown into the toils if I don't come under the rules you have laid down in your mind?"

He did not speak for a moment.

"You ought to know how far this danger goes," he said at last. "I say you are in imminent peril."

"In peril of what?"

"Of your life."

"From whom?"

"From the Golden Coil."

"What is the Golden Coil?"

Josie was speaking with great coolness, and looking Sam Spanker squarely in the eye.

"You will discover very soon if you reject the proposition of safety which I have just made. I am your friend, girl; I don't want to see you robbed of your just rights, but the only avenue to salvation is the one I have just mentioned."

"The one which leads to the fortune through you?"

"That's it, exactly."

The pretty type-writer looked away for a moment. She was watched all the time like a hawk by the man in the room.

"I don't want any notoriety. I won't fight even for what you say is mine by right. Why was I taken from my old rooms and brought to this house?"

"To save you."

"You can't convince me that I was not safe where I was," said the girl. "I was content there at any rate, and that was all I cared for. I tell you I want to go back."

"And you won't go in with me and get the fortune?"

"Go in with you? Why, of course I will not. You must remember that I never saw you until a few days ago. I don't know anything about you, and all I do know is that you came to my home and, surprising me, caught hold of my wrist till I thought your hand was sinking to the bone, and brought me to this place. I want to return. You must take me back."

"You command," smiled the villain, coolly crossing his legs and looking up into the girl's face.

"I do. I will not submit to this imprisonment another hour. It is nothing else. You have no fortune to offer me, you are in the pay of some one, and I will not acquiesce in anything you say."

The rascal fell back in the chair and laughed in Josie's face.

"I shall raise the alarm," she cried, moving across the room, followed by his scrutiny.

"All right. There's no one to hear."

The girl seemed to realize the full terror of the situation, for all at once she stopped and looked into Spanker's face.

"You are a villain of the deepest dye!" she cried, coming toward him.

"You may be right," he added.

"You have a dark motive, and, I believe, are connected with a plot against me, poor as I am!"

"What have I told you? You are rich if you only knew it. You are rich enough to buy me a dozen times over. I don't know how rich you are, but rich enough to make the fur fly even among the millionaires of New York."

He got up as he finished and went toward the door.

His movement was so sudden that Josie for a moment thought he had heard some one there; but when he came back with a smile she knew she had been mistaken.

"Whatever became of your brother, girl?" he asked.

"My brother?" exclaimed the type-writer. "I never had a brother."

"Yes, you had. Here, look at this," and Spanker took from his pocket a photograph which he handed to her.

With a curiosity which she could not beat down, Josie leaned toward the light and looked at the two faces on the card—a boy and a girl, children who, from their looks, were evidently brother and sister.

"That's your brother on your left," continued Sam Spanker, with a quiet grin. "You don't remember him, do you?"

Josie did not speak, but was looking at the photograph intently.

"You know something about my past if you speak the truth," she said at last, looking up and catching the villain's eye.

"I know enough to make you rich."

Her eyes wandered back to the picture.

"I think I can see a resemblance between the boy's face and—"

Sam Spanker was actually holding his breath, but to his disgust Josie did not complete the sentence.

"Here, take it back," she went on. "I don't know what to think. I am an orphan, like my young friend Billy Winks. I don't want to be mixed up in any squabble for a fortune."

Spanker took back the picture, but his eyes rested on the girl's face.

"Well, what you don't know about your past others do," he went on. "It is a sealed book to you, but not to us. They call you Josie Jackson, but that isn't your true name. But, if you won't go in with me and let me pour a golden fortune in your lap, you may always be Josie Jackson, and may never touch the keys of another type-writer."

"Merciful heavens, I understand you. I am to be got out of the way if I don't come over to your plans?"

"That is it exactly," coolly said the scoundrel. "You play with me or you never quit this room alive."

"Then I perish here!" was the heroic answer.

"No compromise with crime!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BILLY COLLIDES WITH THE SPANKER.

THE escape of the man at whom he had fired both troubled and mystified Fred, or "Flash" Phlox.

He did not see how he had avoided killing him, but when he looked down the stair and saw no dead man lying on the floor, he resolved to go away.

He had no doubt that Chuck Holcomb had perished at the hands of the Golden Coil and at the first opportunity he quitted the house and, disguised, hurried to the depot.

"I'm done with this game," said he. "I don't want any more of it, for when you shoot at a man with your pistol right in his face and then have him escape, something is bewitched and the sooner you get out of the affair the better."

He did not know that the man had saved his life by dodging in the nick of time and that the bullet intended for his head had missed it and buried itself in the ceiling.

But, Phlox was not permitted to get out of the city, for in passing along the sidewalk he was run into by a drunken man and tumbled into the gutter. Springing to his feet as soon as he could, he saw the reeling individual upon whom he fell with vengeance in his eye, and the upshot of the whole matter was that instead of quitting the city, he was escorted to the station and left to spend the night in a cell, where he was safe from the Golden Coil.

Phlox wondered what had become of Billy Winks; but as he was not permitted to solve

that question, he fell asleep and dreamed of falling into the Coil's grip, for all at once he awoke with a yell which roused his companions and he was roundly cursed by all.

The next day Billy made his appearance at Phlox's old place, but of course did not find that worthy in.

He was quitting the house when he almost ran against a man who seemed about to enter it and drawing back, he looked at him to recognize the tall person for whom he had delivered the note to Blake Belden.

It was Sam Spanker!

In an instant the keen eyes of Spanker were riveted on the boy detective and though Billy tried to convince him by sundry motions that he was not the person he wanted to see, he was watched with a hawk's eye and followed by Sam.

Under this espionage which he did not like at all, the bell boy ferret went off and turned up in a small Park for the moment out of reach of Sam's eye.

Billy had chosen a seat where the trees grew thick and the early shadows promised to screen him from observation.

He had learned enough of Sam Spanker to know that he was a dangerous man and that it was to his advantage to get rid of him just then.

At any other time he would have been glad to have tracked Sam; but now it was different.

"What became of the boy?" thought the Spanker when he missed Billy. "I had him under my eye awhile ago, but he has given me the slip and I have lost him."

If Sam had kept on he would have missed Billy Winks altogether; but it happened that all at once he came in sight of his prey and the next moment the boy ferret was watched again.

"It is now or never," said Sam. "If I don't trap that young ferret the game will be in danger. I can't do anything with the girl, but I haven't given her up yet. There is too much money in Josie, the type-writer, to let her slip through my fingers, or to carry out Belden's orders. I will bring her round all right after awhile, and to do that I must attend to this sharp-eyed rat of the gutters."

Billy did not know that he was seen by the man he had avoided, for he continued to sit in the Park for some time. When at last he arose and walked toward the street it was with the intention of going to a cheap chop-house near by and getting a cup of coffee and a roll.

Desirous of escaping the eyes of all, he took a seat at the last table in the long and narrow room, but scarcely had he done so when he saw the form of Sam Spanker advancing upon him down the aisle.

"Tracked down!" said he under his breath. "This villain is one of the slickest and I have to face him fairly now."

With his eyes riveted upon Billy, Sam came on and coolly took a seat on the opposite side of the table.

"Good-morning," he said with a grim smile which told the boy ferret that he was recognized.

"Good-morning," responded Billy.

"You will oblige me by not moving till I've discussed a cup of black coffee," continued Sam. "I know you and I guess you were trying to avoid me awhile ago. I don't want to send another note anywhere; but I have business with you all the same."

"All right!" assented Billy, appearing as cool as he knew how to be under the circumstances, and turning to the light breakfast waiter had just brought, he fell-to as if Sam Spanker of the Golden Coil were not in the city, let alone at the very table ready, vulture like, to sink his claws into his arm.

"He's a cool little one," thought the man with the black eyes. "I never saw his like, and if Belden knew him as I think I do, he would consider the whole game in danger while he is at large."

Billy and Sam ate together till the man suddenly pushed back his plate and arose.

At the same time, seeing the crisis was at hand, Billy got up too.

The eye of the rascal was fixed upon him and when he made a move toward the door the hand of the Golden Coil descended upon him and gripped his arm.

"Just as I thought," decided the boy. "This villain is playing one of his cool hands. I wonder if he knows that I took Pappy Pink out of the trap?"

Still gripping Billy's arm, Sam moved toward the door, where he stopped long enough to pay both scores, after which, with another look at his prisoner, he strode from the house and struck the sidewalk.

Up to this moment Billy Winks had not decided what to do. He knew that if he let the rascal have his own way he would be among the missing like Chuck Holcomb and Josie, and that in all probability, the Golden Coil would score its final victory.

"You understand?" said Sam, the moment they reached the pave. "I don't want to resort to harsh measures, but if you don't go quietly along, you will wish you had—that's all."

This was warning enough; but it did not deter the boy detective.

He looked up and down the street, but saw no officer of the force.

As usual when a policeman is wanted none can be seen, and Billy Winks's countenance fell when he made this discovery.

The next moment an empty cab turned the nearest corner and came toward them.

Was this design or an accident?

When Sam Spanker saw the cab his eyes lit up with pleasure.

Leading his captive from the sidewalk he ran out into the street and hailed the man on the box.

"No you don't!" cried the boy, pulling stoutly back and exerting all his strength. "I don't intend to become a rat in your trap. Hello! I know the driver. It is Jimmy Jinks of the old hotel."

The last words were not spoken aloud, therefore Sam did not hear them and when the vehicle came alongside he opened the door and hustled the boy inside.

"Which way?" asked the driver.

Instead of answering him verbally, Sam scrawled a number on a card and handed it out of the window.

Away went the cab and the next moment the Man of the Coil was looking triumphantly into Billy's face.

For a time the boy seemed dazed by the sudden turning of the tide. He had been on the top wave of success, but now was under the water and in the web of the spider.

It was torture for him to take that ride with Sam Spanker. It tore his heart to think that he was going to a den from which there might be no escape, while Josie, somewhere in the same toils, was suffering in silence.

The rattling cab went up one street and down another.

Billy looked out and in passing a certain block said to himself.

"We are within a square of the old Metropolis. I am going to try it, even if I get choked for the job."

The following moment the bell boy sprung toward the window and before Spanker could stop him he had thrust out his hand and seized the driver's coat.

"To the Metropolis Jimmy!" he shouted. "I am in the grip of a rascal of the deepest dye. I am Billy Winks. You know me."

The last sentence was stifled by the hand of Spanker who had pulled the boy back, but the driver had heard enough, for he turned short and flashing his horses into a mad gallop, tore down another street.

In vain did Sam rave and curse the man on the box. He kept on, never minding the anathemas, and when the heated horses pulled up in front of the old hotel, Billy Winks's heart took a great leap in his bosom.

"Move on!" shouted Sam.

"I won't. Me and Billy ar' old friends," was the reply.

Sam turned upon the boy ferret with a demon in his eye.

"I've a mind to finish you here," he cried.

"Better not try it," said Billy who was almost at the rascal's mercy, while he wondered why no one came to his rescue.

Spanker laid his hand on something that rested in an inner pocket.

"Help! help!" shouted the boy detective vociferously.

In a moment the door of the cab was thrown open by a man in uniform, and saying that the boy inside seemed to be sick, Sam Spanker, with the coolness of an alderman, stepped out and walked away.

"Where is he?" cried Billy as he tumbled from the vehicle. "What, didn't you take him? Well, this beats all!"

CHAPTER XV.

BETSY SNIPE STILL HOLDS THE FORT.

"THE next time I won't let him get away," avowed Sam, when he turned a corner and, dodging into a building, escaped for the time. "He is a hard rat to hold, but the trap will work all right next time. He happened to know the driver of the cab, and that was bad for me."

Look out, Billy Winks! I don't intend to stop till I have caged you, for I know how dangerous you are."

Half an hour later he met a man on the street, and the two adjourned to a place where they knew they were safe from observation.

To his friend Sam related the adventure of the morning, and ended by saying that the Bell Boy Detective would have to be watched as he had had not been watched before.

"I know that, Sam. He is just the sort of chap to give us trouble. I will hold him if he falls into my hands, or my name isn't Simon Short. By the way, what did you let the old man go for?"

"Pappy Pink? I didn't let him go."

"But he is gone, all the same. I have just come from the house, and the room is empty." Spanker started.

"He has escaped!" he cried. "If this is true he will go back to his old quarters and won't be hard to find."

"Unless the boy rescued him, when he won't be found in the old house."

Blake Belden's right-hand man made no reply for a moment.

"I have made up my mind to call and see a woman I ran across the other day on the street," he went on.

"The one you told me about—Betsy Snipe?"

"Yes."

"Belden, the boss, has seen her."

"The dickens he has!" cried Sam.

"He has, indeed, and the interview wasn't a very pleasant one, from what he has dropped in my presence."

"Well?"

"He came down to business at once, and coolly asked me what I thought it would cost to get the old creature out of the city?"

"And you told him—"

"That I wasn't hankering after the job."

"Simon Short, you missed a chance to line your pockets with the yellow stuff," informed Sam. "He would have given you a good slice of the Pettibone estate."

"I don't doubt it; but I don't intend to run my neck into a halter for the sake of a few dollars."

The man who listened fell back in his chair and laughed.

"Well, I'll go and see Betsy, anyhow. She may know me and she may not. I want to see just what she knows, for if she is the Betsy Snipe of New Jersey, she knows enough to wreck the whole game, for she was the nurse of the Pettibone children."

"She's got a tongue like a viper."

"Then, it's the original Betsy."

Sam Spanker made his way to the scene of Blake Belden's encounter with Billy Winks's friend and in a little while stood in her presence.

Betsy Snipe was cautious after her last adventure and after admitting Sam, she seemed to regret it.

"What do you want?" she inquired in her sharp tones.

"I want to know a few things that might be turned to our mutual advantage."

"You do? Do you mean that you would turn them so as to help me as well as yourself?"

"That's it exactly."

"Nary a turn then," said the woman. "I don't want anything to do with you."

"But you don't know me."

"I know enough about you. You are the young man who years and years ago used to sit on the Jersey fences and laugh at Betsy Snipe. Don't know you, eh? You are Sam Spanker of Spankersville."

In spite of himself Sam had to fall back in his chair and laugh. It was irresistibly funny to have his youth brought up by that woman whom he remembered so well, and while he laughed he was eyed by the hatchet-faced creature whose hands seemed ready to pay him back for the acts of his younger days.

All at once the laughing ceased and putting on quite another face, Sam leaned toward the woman.

"How have you managed to escape the law so long?" he asked.

There was a sudden recoil and he had Betsy Snipe staring at him as if he had suddenly shown an officer's badge.

"That is what puzzles me, Betsy Snipe," he went on. "You have done enough to be putting in your time at Sing Sing, but here you are living in clover and as happy as a bee."

"Ho, ho! As happy as a bee, eh? What are you doing, Sam Spanker?" was the retort. "What are you up to now? I have no doubt that, since I see'd you last, you've committed

enough crimes to be hung a thousand times. There's lots o' Jersey people in this city now, and they're not all of the honest kind, either."

Sam listened and did not speak till Betsy had finished.

"Look here, Betsy Snipe, I believe you know."

"You believe I know what?"

"Where the children are."

The face of the old woman was seen to lose color.

"If I did, do you think I would tell you?" she said. "Why should I tell you or any one else?"

"Ha, that settles it. You know where they are! What does the boy call himself now?"

But to this there was no reply. Betsy Snipe with clinched hands backed away from Sam Spanker.

"Go away!" she commanded.

Sam seemed to take a new grip on the chair.

"I know, Sam Spanker. I know who the boy is, and where he is to be found. I also know who the girl is, and what's become of her. Do you think, after what has happened, that I wouldn't keep the pair under my eye?"

Blake Belden's agent seemed to hold his breath.

"I thought all the time you knew. Do you know, Betsy Snipe, that you can go up the river for that guilty knowledge?"

"What! failing himself, did he send you hither to get the information? Did Blake Belden send you to me to get the truth?"

"I'm here on my own hook."

"No, you're not. You are in his pay, and that's easily seen. I am not going to tell you anything."

Sam Spanker looked into the woman's face and thought:

"She never did scare very much, and she don't know how now. Betsy Snipe is a cool woman, and she has confessed that she knows where the boy is. I want to know myself. I must know, and before I quit this room."

For some time the pair eyed each other, and then Sam moved his chair toward the door.

"Go!" again commanded the undaunted woman.

"When you've told me what I want to know."

"Then you'll sit there till you're gray."

"Oh, I'll go out and come back with somebody long before that."

"You mean with an officer, don't you?"

Sam's eyes answered.

"I wish you would," declared Betsy. "I wish you would go out and bring in a cop. I want to tell all I know, but only in his presence. I never felt like telling anything since I helped Blake Belden as I do right now."

The rascal of the Coil was nonplused for a moment.

"You don't mean that," he laughed. "You're the last woman to tell a story that would get you behind bars."

"It wouldn't deprive me of many years."

"Come. Don't play the fool for a little sentiment. You are losing thousands by not telling where the boy is."

"That's what he intimated. But, why only the boy?"

Sam Spanker grinned.

"Do you mean that you've found the other one?" she demanded.

He was over-bold now, for he risked a good deal when he said:

"That's what I mean."

"I see through the whole scheme! The will was worded so that if the children did not turn up after so many years, the whole property was to become the permanent estate of Blake Belden."

"You're right, Betsy, old gal!"

"And you have found the girl and probably silenced her."

"We're getting along pretty well, thank you."

Betsy Snipe did not speak.

"Where is the boy?" persisted the man. "I am willing to share with you, woman. I will make you know want no more. You sha'n't be punished for your work in Jersey. I will stand between you and that."

"You? You, a perjured wretch, stand between me and the law? Why, you are likely to swing yourself before you get out of this game. I won't tell you. There! I don't propose to throw the boy into the hands of the man who wants him out of the way."

"All right, then. I only wanted to know what you would do. I shall play my hand now."

"I will keep my secret until I am ready to

tell it where it will do him some good," she cried, advancing menacingly upon him. "I know both of them, the boy especially. I have seen him every day for years and the girl not so often. I know the heirs of the Pettibone thousands; I know that Blake Belden is here to make his way clear to the estate; that he has employed you to help him. Betsy Snipe, if she is guilty of a crime, stands between you and success. You can't succeed without I help you, and I'll rot first!"

Sam Spanker shrunk from the menacing eyes and nervous hands before him, and, almost before he knew how it happened, found himself on the outside of the door, having been thrown into the hall by the irate creature.

"Jehosaphat! Goliath in petticoats!" cried Sam.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WRONG MAN FREED.

THE bell boy's adventure with Sam Spanker in the cab told him that he was dealing with a desperate scoundrel and that it behooved him to look out for Number One.

He had learned a good deal about the relations which had existed in the past between Blake Belden and Mother Snipe, and resolved to follow up this clew.

If he had been at home during Sam Spanker's visit to the old woman he might have overheard them and been a witness to the rascal's defeat by the "Goliath in petticoats," but he happened to be out of the house at the time and was on another trail that promised to yield him something.

As we have seen, Blake Belden was considerably cut up over his discomfiture and as he walked homeward he concluded to get even with Mother Snipe and pay her back for her scorn of him.

"There is one thing certain," said the conspirator. "I am being made the dupe of the very men I have employed to help me out of the game. Sam Spanker has the girl somewhere and won't tell me where. Only a few hours ago he extracted five thousand from me, and if I don't circumvent him in some manner I will be at his mercy all the time. I must discover this girl's whereabouts myself and then I will be on top."

This was easier said than done, but Belden set about the task with a good deal of shrewdness and hope, and before long he had tracked Sam to a house in which he was sure the pretty typewriter was confined.

Still he did not try to enter until he had seen Sam come out and walk away.

The place looked common enough and, in his mind, was just the place for the girl's prison.

Belden was now a desperate man, for a fortune was slipping through his fingers, and he could almost see the Pettibone children in possession of their own.

When he had effected an entrance into the house he stopped and listened.

For a time he could hear no noise; then a strange sound was borne to his ears.

It did not sound like a human voice, but Belden was not to be deterred, for he had come to the house with the intention of carrying out certain resolutions; so, at once crossing the room he had entered, he tried the door ahead. To his astonishment it opened readily, but he fell back, with a stifled cry at the sight he saw.

Lashed to a chair, and the picture of starvation and death, sat a man whose eyes had a glassy look which seemed to congeal the artful Belden's blood.

"Who are you?" he cried; "in Heaven's name, what are you doing in this house?"

A ghastly grin overspread the face before him.

"I'm all that is left of Chuck Holcomb. I have suffered a thousand deaths. For Heaven's sake, either release me or send me to my final account."

Chuck Holcomb!

No wonder Blake Belden fell back and stared at the occupant of the chair. This was the man who had come to New York in company with Flash Phlox to prevent his winning the very triumph he was after! He had fallen into Sam Spanker's net and was now on the verge of the grave!

"Who are you?" asked Holcomb. "Ah, I see now! I recognize your face. You are Belden, but known as Van Loo, the man who wants to hold on to the Pettibone fortune. I can't say that I don't blame you, but you see what your tool has done. I am about ready to quit the game, but I don't want to die here in this manner."

Instead of cutting the rope that bound Chuck

to the torture chair, he coolly took a seat near by and said:

"You don't mean what you've just told me. You want to get out so as to carry out your part of the scheme. You want to beat me at every point, and I don't intend to trust you out of that chair."

"You don't, eh?"

"I can't afford to, you see. It would be giving my enemy a trump card, and that I don't intend to do."

Holcomb looked at Belden for a moment and then ground his teeth.

"Well, I hope they'll catch all of you in the end and give you your just deserts," he answered. "It will come. I am not the only one in the game against you."

"We know who the other one is, and we're able to take care of him. Your friend, Phlox, won't trouble us very much, and when we close in on him there won't be any one in our way."

Holcomb looked away once more, and even shut his eyes.

"What had you discovered when we came down on you on your way to Pappy Pink with his letter in your pocket?" Belden asked.

"Never mind what."

"Well, let me impart a little information. We have discovered the lost heirs," said the villain, gloatingly.

The Philadelphia shadower started.

"What! found the children?" he cried. "I don't believe you, Blake Belden."

"Just as you like about that," was the rejoinder. "We have the game in our own hands at last, and there will be no turning up of the little ones. Your master has failed, for without the heirs he can do nothing."

Holcomb seemed to realize this, yet he did not know whether to believe the rascal or not.

"Since you don't want to tell me anything, I will leave you alone," continued Belden, arising and moving toward the door.

He was followed by the gaze of the man in the chair, and when he reached the door he was called back.

"I want to get out of this place at any price," Holcomb said. "I can't die here in my condition of mind. Let me out and I will quit the game for good. I will tell you all I know—"

"You will, eh?"

"Yes, yes—everything! I won't keep a single secret back."

Belden looked at the prisoner a moment, and then advanced upon him.

He had taken from his pocket a knife which he had opened, and Holcomb was looking at it like a grateful pensioner.

"There, you are free now," said Belden, when he had severed the strong line that lashed him to the fateful chair, and the man could sit bolt upright and feel the blood course uninterrupted through his veins once more.

"I am not afraid to trust you. Now, you must keep your promise with me."

"I will. Go on!"

"Are you the sole tenant of this house?"

"I think I am."

"Are you sure there is no other captive under this roof?"

"I have never heard of another."

Belden looked disappointed.

"Chuck Holcomb, you don't care much who you serve, do you?" he went on. "Of course you haven't a very friendly feeling for the man who tied you to that Devil's seat, and the truth is, he is getting too arbitrary for me."

"Sam Spanker, eh?"

"Yes. He is nothing more nor less than a bleeder. I want a man whom I can trust and for such a person I will pay liberally."

Holcomb eyed the plotter sharply, but did not speak.

"Look here, Belden: I don't know but what we might come to an agreement," and while he spoke he slid across the floor as deftly as his swollen feet would permit. "We ought to be friends when a common interest unites us. I don't care much about the children, and, as you know, I entered this game for the money there was in it for me."

"I thought so, Chuck."

The half starved man had risen from the chair and Belden saw in the depths of his eyes a light he had not noticed before. Instinctively he retreated toward the door.

"I will talk to you as I should!" suddenly shouted Chuck, springing at the scoundrel, and before the astounded Belden could resist, he found his hand pinioned by an iron grip and the blazing orbs of the desperate Holcomb burning in his face.

"Take my place if you please!" he command-

ed. "Go to the chair and see by actual experience how it is yourself!"

Horror settled over Blake Belden's face, but, despite his struggles he was thrust into the chair. Then the eager hands of Holcomb were not long in lashing him in it with the rope which still hung over its arms.

The infuriated man's task was accomplished before Belden could recover from his astonishment, and when he found himself bound in the seat he groaned in absolute fear.

"Sam, ere he went off awhile ago, told me that he would never come back," Holcomb informed him. "He left me to perish here and, as you must have noticed when you dropped in, I was near the end. I had no hopes when you came; but now, the tables have turned and I have you in the toils. This is an awful place at night. The house is haunted by a headless ghost and what one sees here when all is dark makes one's blood run cold."

Belden shuddered and gasped.

"Good by, Blake Belden! The next time you run across an enemy in a torture-chair be careful what you do. You have found the Pettibone children, did you say? Frankly, I don't believe it. You have lied before and one can't put any dependence on your word. I want to tell you here that I am going back to the trail like a whirlwind of vengeance. I know I'm not a saint; but I intend to help justice this time—"

Chuck Holcomb stopped suddenly and leaned toward his captive.

"Heavens, he has fainted!" he cried.

It was true. The horror of his situation had deprived Blake Belden of consciousness.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LITTLE GAME THAT FAILED.

SAM SPANKER was greatly incensed over the rough treatment he had received at Mother Snipe's hands, and he vowed with more than one hard oath that he would get even with her.

Besides this, the old woman was dangerous, and the sooner he got her out of the way the better it would be for the Golden Coil. If she really knew the whereabouts of the two heirs, she would always remain a stumbling-block in the way of the plot, and the surest way to get rid of her would be to abduct her, and see that she never came back any more.

It was night, and nearly twelve, when Sam and Simon Short, his partner, crouching in the shadow of some bales on one of the wharves, were in secret consultation on this very point.

The pair had stolen to the spot for this meeting, and were talking in low tones while the waves broke against the water-soaked piles, and receded into the dark distance of the river.

Near by, and in the shadow of the same bales, lay something that did not look much like a human form, but which had a pair of keen eyes and sharp ears.

If the two rascals had taken the care to look back oftener than they did, they might have seen the shadow by which they had been followed to the pier, and this chapter would not be written.

Crime continually makes blunders, and on this occasion it made a very serious one for Sam and Simon.

After detailing his adventure with Mother Snipe, Spanker went on to unfold his scheme.

"You can get the cab again," he explained. "You know how to play cabby to perfection, and I will do the stealing. I have never tried to capture a rattlesnake, and I can't say that I like the job; but something's got to be done with that woman. She knows too much, Simon, and she's liable to tell it just where we don't want it told—at Police Headquarters."

"If she takes a notion to tell it there the jig is up," said Simon Short.

"Exactly. We've got to circumvent her tonight yet."

Simon drew his watch and looked at it in the light of the nearest lamp.

It was just twelve.

"She's asleep now," he observed.

"Of course. I know how to get into the room. She sometimes stays up till nearly morning, for of late I've seen a light in her room till after this hour."

"If she's awake she won't let you in."

"Don't let the getting in bother you. Will you do the driving?"

"Yes."

Every word of this plot was heard by the person crouched in the shadow of the bales, and the eyes glowed with unwonted brilliancy.

"It's the coolest plot of the whole game," said the listener, "but they're liable to find their hands full of a bad job when they come to carry off Mother Snipe. She's got the pluck of a tiger

and they ought to know that with her secrets she don't intend to be carried off to prevent the success of Justice in this plot against the Pettibone children."

We need not say that the speaker was Billy Winks, the boy ferret, nor that he had followed the two scamps to the pier and by sneaking up on them, had overheard every word of the plot against Mother Snipe, who was to be carried off yet that night, and placed somewhere where she would be powerless to aid the cause of right.

The plot stirred every drop of the young detective's blood, and he had listened to the men with indignation tugging at his heart-strings.

He did not quit his place until he saw the forms of Sam and Simon fade in the distance; then he sprang up and bounded nimbly away.

"Shall I go for help or can we outwit them?" he questioned. "She is both cunning and strong, and with my help may get away with the two vultures. I guess I won't go for help. I told Nelse, Josie's beau, the other day, that I would not call any policemen into this case till I had to. I've worked it up so far without help, and I won't call for any now."

A few minutes later the bell boy ferret crept into the house, which had been his home for years, and went to his room.

As he passed Mother Snipe's door he heard no noise which might indicate that the old woman was still up, but a light shining through the key-hole told him that the room was not dark.

In the solitude of his little chamber, Billy Winks waited for the plotters.

After awhile he heard a vehicle pass up the street, and then all was still once more.

Presently a footstep came up the stairs, for he had left his door open for the purpose of hearing it.

Had the plotters come for Mother Snipe?

The whole house seemed to be buried in slumber, and not a sound calculated to disturb the slick game was to be heard.

Billy Winks stole to the door and looked out. He caught sight of a dark figure in the old hall, and then heard a gentle rap on Mother Snipe's portals.

"That is Sam Spanker, the man who had me in his grip in the cab," thought Billy. "He has come to do the work, and Simon is sitting on the box below."

For a moment the figure of the man at the old woman's door was seen by the boy, and then a streak of light fell into the hall as the portal was opened.

The next moment the figure of the villain disappeared in Mother Snipe's room, and Billy took several steps from his door.

"Not a word, if you want to live another minute!" he heard a voice say. "I have come back for the truth about the boy. You said you know where he is—not in so many words, but I understood it, all the same—and that is what I'm here for. You threw me out of the house and I did not resist, but now I'm here to play a hand of trumps and you will come with me."

"With you?" cried Mother Snipe. "You don't know me, Sam Spanker. I am able to defend myself and, as for telling you where the boy is—I would rot first!"

"Ho, not so bad as that, I hope. But come, I can't waste time here. We have a carriage below and you will permit me to use this handkerchief—"

There was a brief struggle and from the sounds he heard, Billy Winks knew that this time the villain had taken advantage of the woman and that she was in his power.

He ran to the door, but halted there.

Sam had taken care to shut it when he entered the chamber, but it was not locked.

"Help! help!" rung from Mother Snipe's throat, but the last cry was suddenly stifled.

"I never let a fly get out of my web," laughed the man in the room. "There is too much at stake to let you escape, Mother Snipe, but if you don't give us too much trouble, you may come back to the old nest and end your days in peace."

There was no answer to this. The truth is, Mother Snipe was too well gagged to make one, for the handkerchief had been drawn over her mouth and she was in the grip of the tool of the Golden Coil.

With his hand on the latch of the room, Billy Winks hesitated. He hardly knew what to do—whether to rush in and confront the rascal or try to follow the cab in hopes of discovering something about Josie.

His indecision was cut short by the opening of the door and he dropped back along the wall where there was no light and stood straight up against it.

He saw Sam Spanker emerge from the room with Mother Snipe in his grip; he noticed that, despite her tiger strength, the woman was in his power, and while he looked he thought he saw a gleam of triumph in Spanker's eye.

This was more than the boy ferret could stand. He rushed from the shadow of the hallway and faced the astonished man.

"Halt! Let Mother Snipe alone!" he cried.

Sam Spanker, terrified by the voice for an instant, recoiled and almost released his victim.

"You see I have the drop on you, Sam Spanker. You should have held me when you had me in the cab."

"Jehosaphat! the boy!" exclaimed the plotter. "I wish I had choked you when I had the chance. Stand back and drop that gun—"

"Release Mother Snipe!"

Sam was not disposed to do this, but the menace of the little revolver which Billy Winks held in his face was an argument he did not relish.

"Let her go, and be quick about it!" Billy ordered. "This is a game which two people can play at, Sam Spanker. I know what took place on the wharf. I had the pleasure of lying behind the bale and listening to the whole sweet scheme."

Spanker looked wickedly into the face revealed in the light from Mother Snipe's room, and Billy moved a step nearer.

"Go back to your master, Blake Belden, alias Van Loo, and report failure," continued Billy. "I guess the game is nearly up. It will end when they hang you for the murder of Chuck Holcomb."

Sam laughed, when he suddenly threw Mother Snipe almost headlong across her own threshold, and then stood grinning at Billy Winks and wishing that he could sweep the revolver aside.

"Some other time!" said he, madly. "I'm not through with you yet, boy."

"Just as you like. Here, Mother Snipe, we'll even up matters right now. Take hold of Sam Spanker. If he moves, I'll press the trigger and save the sheriff a job."

With a joyful cry, the woman came toward Spanker, her eyes fairly glistening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SURPRISES ALL AROUND.

COWED by the weapon in the determined boy's grip, the man of many crimes did not stir. He felt the firm hand of Mother Snipe at his arm and drew back alarmed, as he stared into eyes that boded him no good.

"I guess that will do," continued Billy, when Sam had been bound. "I'll go down and see what's become of Simon Short."

"You won't find him around," Sam declared.

"I won't, eh? He isn't waiting near here with the cab? He didn't agree to be on hand with the vehicle that was to convey Mother Snipe somewhere? Oh, no! But I'll go down and see, all the same."

Guarded by the woman, who watched him with the eyes of a hawk, Sam Spanker began a cunning game which did not succeed. He offered first his watch, and then a goodly sum of money if Mother Snipe would let him go; but he soon discovered that he might as well have talked to stone.

The old woman, who hated him most cordially, was as deaf as a post to his entreaties, and when he took the other turn and began to threaten, he found that he fared no better.

In a short time steps came up the stair, and Sam started when he heard them; as well he might, for soon, to his horror, two persons stood before him, and Billy Winks, looking at his companion while he pointed at the villain, said quietly:

"That is the man, Captain Duckgun. That is Sam Spanker, the partner of the man we arrested on the box of the cab."

Spanker fell back from the tall policeman without a vestige of color on his face. Simon Short arrested, and he himself in the meshes of the law? It was enough to shock him.

"I'll drive the rig to the station, captain," continued Billy. "It'll do me more good than getting the Pettibone fortune if I was one of the heirs."

"Who told you you were?" cried Mother Snipe, running forward and clutching the boy's arm.

Billy Winks's look became a stare, and when Duckgun laid his hand on Spanker's arm, to lead him away, the Golden Coil's right bower exclaimed:

"I think I see something now. Why didn't you tell me or intimate as much, Mother Snipe?"

"I didn't have to; and then, I don't think I've given anything away."

With this, the rascal was led from the house

to the sidewalk, where he found Simon Short manacled in the bottom of a cab which was guarded by a patrolman, and Billy, mounting the box, drove down the street.

A few minutes later the two scoundrels entered the station-house, and when they found themselves alone in the cell, Sam clutched his companion's arm.

"What fools we have been!" said he. "Why didn't I guess Mother Snipe's secret before? But, it is too late now, and our only hope for mercy lies in our telling everything and getting Belden as deep in the pickle as we can."

"But Holcomb?"

"I don't think the fellow's dead yet. I told him that I would come back no more."

"And the girl, Josie?"

"I guess we'll have to tell them where she is, and there is old Pappy Pink. You know who he is, don't you Simon?"

"I've an idea," answered the other one.

"When I saw the cop walking toward me, with the boy, I seized the lines, but the pistol held me and in a jiffy I was in the toils."

Thus through the whole night long the two men talked in the darkness and gloom of the cell, and when morning came they were brought out for examination.

All at once Sam Spanker recoiled on his seat with a wild cry, for there had entered the room a man at whom he stared as if his eyes would pop from his head.

"That's the vulture who had me in his beak," said this person, who was Chuck Holcomb, haggard of countenance and hungry looking. "That is Sam Spanker, the tool of the man called Van Loo, but who really is Blake Belden, the plotter."

Both Sam and Simon sat spellbound and glared at Holcomb.

"I left him in the chair," continued Chuck, bending forward and grinning in their faces.

"I guess he is safe there—as safe as I was till he came and in a foolish moment cut me loose. Do you know this boy, Sam? I know him now!"

Already Sam was looking at Billy Winks, who had accompanied Holcomb to the station after accidentally picking him up on the street.

The rascal made no reply for a moment when he suddenly said:

"Does Belden know it?"

"Not yet," answered Holcomb. "We are going to the house now."

The two pards exchanged looks, when Simon Short turned to the officer in charge and said they were ready to make a clean breast of the whole thing.

This they were allowed to do, after which Billy Winks, accompanied by Chuck Holcomb for a guide, and an officer, went to the house where Holcomb had left Blake Belden in the torture chair.

When they opened the door of the fatal room all three looked amazedly at each other. Chuck was the first to speak.

"The eel has given us the slip!" he cried.

Yes, the chair was empty and Belden was gone!

"To his house, then!" ordered the officer, and thither they proceeded.

A search of the premises showed that Belden had been there, but had executed a hurried flight, and the three turned away.

"That man mustn't escape!" cried Billy Winks.

"I promise you that he shall not," was the official's assurance.

The confession made by Sam Spanker and Simon Short revealed Josie's hiding-place, and the pretty type-writer was at once set free.

She was overwhelmed with surprise when told that she was one of the lost Pettibone heirs; but, when Mother Snipe turned to Billy Winks, and leading him forward spoke again to Josie, another scene ensued:

"Josie, this is the other one," said the old woman. "This is no longer Billy Winks, but your own brother, Mr. Pettibone."

"What, me?" cried Billy. "Mother Snipe, I kin swallow a good deal, but this is too much. Couldn't you have made the pill a little smaller?"

Then followed a strange story from Mother Snipe's lips—a story too long to be repeated here; but she told it so straight, and so proved everything as she went along, that there was no doubting it.

Billy Winks and Josie were the lost heirs of the Pettibone thousands, and the Bell Boy Detective, while working up the case against the Golden Coil, was all the time unconsciously helping himself and clearing up the mystery that surrounded his own life.

It was such a time for surprises that no one

was astonished when Pappy Pink turned out to be John Pettibone, who had not perished at the destruction of his Jersey home, but who had wandered off after that event, singularly affected. He almost at once had become invention mad, and actually seemed to be unaware of his own identity.

Sam and Simon, the two sharps, did not secure leniency by making a clean breast of the infamous plot. They were tried and given long terms in Sing Sing where they are to-day, and when Blake Belden was hunted down, as he was, and brought to justice, the two wretches once more looked into the face of their old master.

Belden, coward like, tried to take his own life in the city prison, but was frustrated, and went "up the river" for a term that promises to amount to a life sentence.

Chuck Holcomb and Phlox disappeared after the arrest and conviction of Belden; Mother Snipe moved into better quarters, while John Pettibone, Pappy Pink no longer, went back to Jersey, where he took possession of the old estate and with his children began a new life.

It was not long, however, before he was called upon to give "Josie" up, for Nelse Martin claimed her, and Billy—we must call him by his old name—accompanied the young couple on their wedding tour.

"I don't feel as good as I did when I was bell boy at the old Metropolis, or unwinding the meshes of the Golden Coil," he declared the day of Josie's wedding. "I think I will go over to New York some time and set up as a detective on my own hook. I know the traps and trails of the old city pretty well and I just like the excitement. The land is full of Sam Spankers and Blake Beldens and they need watching. Yes, I think I'll go to the city and settle down to business as rogue-catcher and crook-trailer."

John Pettibone's inventions, really novel and singularly practical, have been recognized, and he has "struck it rich," and while he is happy once more on the old farm, and Blake Belden is justly in durance vile, the bright boy who worked up the great Pettibone mystery to find that he himself was a part of it, has struck his true calling, and, if no ill betides him, will make his mark as one of that battalion of Hawkshaws whose silent hand is the great city's best protection against the army of rogues whose presence is a ceaseless menace to every good citizen.

THE END.

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